

A BOND
OF
SYMPATHY

BY
LIEUT COL.
ANDREW
HAGGARD

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A Bond of
Sympathy

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

A CANADIAN GIRL

Crown 8vo, 6s.

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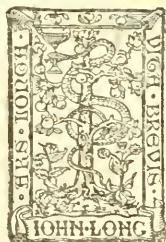
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A Bond of Sympathy

By

Lieutenant-Colonel Andrew Haggard
D.S.O.

Author of "Under Crescent and Star," "Sporting Yarns," "Tempest Torn,"
"Sidelights on the Court of France," etc.



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PREFACE

SILVER BELLS was an Indian maiden who really existed. With exception of the final scene, which was learned from other sources, the facts concerning her and her English lover came direct from Ready Rifle to the author.

To C. E. E. USSHER, Esq.,
Of Montreal, Canada.

MY DEAR MR USSHER,

Where the iron horse now runs across the vast continent of British North America the buffalo and the Indian roamed formerly undisturbed.

Since, however, with the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway across the Rockies to the Pacific, Canada became one vast Dominion, the sportsman and the wanderer in the wilds need not regret the change from former days.

To none more than yourself, and your considerate colleagues in the management of the mighty line, must we wielders of the rifle and the rod give thanks. Through you, can we not now roam much farther afield than when the Indian and buffalo alone held undisputed sway?

To you—Brother Sportsman—who, rifle in hand, have often experienced the charm of the wilderness, I dedicate the pages of my story.

ANDREW HAGGARD.

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CHAPTER I

CHRISTMASTIDE AT THORNHAM

THORNHAM HALL, in the county of Norfolk, was ablaze with light. From the big doors, thrown widely open as each successive carriage drove up crunching the gravel but lightly powdered with snow, there shone forth the genial glow of an enormous fire of Yule logs blazing within. In the oak panelled hall, upon whose walls, well bedecked with holly, there hung many a trophy of the chase, stood Mr Digby, the Squire. As he waited to receive his guests he kept glancing with pride at the stalwart figure beside him, indeed towering over him by a head, that of his only son, Geoffrey. Both father and son were attired in the dress costume of the Hunt of which the Squire had been for many years the master. The firelight from the enormous blaze dancing upon the polished gilt buttons of their scarlet, or, as custom has it, "pink" coats, was the sole illumination that displayed them to view. For the Squire's will it was that no other light save that of the mighty Yule fire should shine forth into the frosty night to delight the eyes of his good friends arriving from all the countryside. It was enough indeed, and far more cheery as a welcoming beacon after a long night drive than that of the enormous hanging chandeliers glittering in the spacious rooms

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beyond, cleared for dancing and steaming with the fragrant coffee awaiting the half-frozen visitors.

The father was a handsome man of middle age, ruddy and healthy, with a quick blue eye and well-trimmed beard, as yet but slightly touched with grey, while his hair was still as brown as that of the tall young fellow beside him. His face showed both geniality and determination; a conscious strength of character lay in its clearly cut features, which often had made itself felt when either commanding in the hunting field or presiding over his brother magistrates as chairman of Quarter Sessions.

The son, in whose honour the Squire had thrown his house open, had a peculiarly frank and manly and yet modest bearing; his eyes were blue like his father's, but with a more dreamy, self-contained expression. He was athletic in build and looked about twenty-four. Had it not been for the pronounced moustache which relieved his somewhat pale, if tanned, features, one would have called him almost a boy. He seemed rather nervous in manner when, a batch of guests having arrived, had been shaken hands with by the father, presented to the son and ushered into a disrobing room beyond, Geoffrey and the Squire were left momentarily alone.

"Father," said the young man, with a deprecating smile, "don't you think you could let me off any more of this? I feel as if I were being made a show of to all these people, not half of whom I know, and upon my word, father, I don't like it, you know."

"Well, I do like it, old fellow," replied his parent, "and surely, after gratifying your own inclinations by wandering about Canada for so long and fighting that rascally rebel Riel in the backwoods and getting yourself wounded, you will now gratify my paternal pride for once by way of a change. Confound it, lad! I have only got one son, and precious little it is that either I or anyone else have seen of him, so now that I have the opportunity of showing him off, by Jove! you would

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not grudge the old governor the pleasure, would you?"

"Oh! all right, father. If you put it that way I don't mind, and I'll stick by you here as long as you like, but only upon one condition all the same, or else I'll make a bolt of it and join my mother and sister in the drawing-room."

"Join the squaws, will you? as I suppose you call 'em. Well I'm hanged if I let you just yet, Geoff, so tell me the condition and I'll see if we can make terms."

"Simply that you don't say another word to anyone who arrives about my having been fighting or got wounded. If you do, I'm off like a shot."

"All right, my boy, I'll keep it to myself, especially," he added with a gratified chuckle, "as there is not a man, woman or child in the county who has not seen the account of the fight at Duck Lake reported at length in the *Norfolk Chronicle*."

"Yes, and my blessed father's remarks in the Shire Hall at Swaffham as well, I suppose, confound it!" said the young man, impatiently, after which he resigned himself to his fate.

Presently, however, there arrived a group in the doorway which made him forget everything in his delight at seeing a much longed for face again.

"Mrs Strangford, how are you? Why, Connie, Connie! how glad I am to see you," he added a moment later, extending both hands to the daughter as soon as he could with decency relinquish the hand of the mother.

To judge by the bright light which sprang to the eyes of the brilliant girl, whom Geoffrey rapidly divested of her cloak, thus detaining her while her mother and a gentleman accompanying them passed on with the Squire, Constance Strangford was as pleased as Geoffrey himself.

"Oh! what a long time it has been, Geoff, since I saw you, and I am so glad that you're home safe at last and now we'll have fine times again, won't we? How

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is your wound, Geoff? We are all so proud of you here in Norfolk."

"Oh! bother my wound. How splendid you look. Here, take this programme and let me put myself down for the first three dances to start with. I can have them, can't I, Connie?"

"Of course!—oh, but I forgot, perhaps only two. Sir Reginald might not quite like it."

"Sir Reginald?"

"Yes, Sir Reginald Carnforth, who is staying with us, you know; he just went on with mother. He's an old diplomat and a bit of a stickler for *les convenances*; so mother, who thinks a lot of him, told me to be careful. He rather admires mother, I think, and, well, she does look handsome to-night, doesn't she?"

"I never noticed, Connie, I am ashamed to say, for I had eyes for no one but you, but still, of course, if you want to keep her in a good humour we'll only put them down by twos, all over the programme, here and there. Will that suit you?"

"Yes, I suppose so," said the girl, rather doubtfully. "I don't think Sir Reginald can mind—"

"Oh! bother the old fool, of course he can't; anyway, I have a right to you, I suppose? Now come along, we'll get rid of your cloak and join your mother before she is waiting for you. Ah, here she comes! Mrs Strangford, will you come and have some coffee? I'll just hand in Connie's cloak!"

When the young man reappeared from the door of the disrobing room, where it had only taken him a second to hand the fur cloak to a maid, he was rather chagrined to see that his Connie had already been marched off by the courtly Sir Reginald, while her mother awaited himself to follow them to the coffee-table. Here several guests separated them from the others. Presently Mrs Strangford, again taking Geoffrey's arm, said, "Now, shall we go to your mother?" At the same time she made a sign to her daughter, and the Baronet with her, to join them.

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As she presented the latter to Geoffrey the young man thought that he had never seen features that he disliked so much. There was something sinister and sly in the otherwise refined face of Sir Reginald Carnforth, a man of about fifty-five, and very well preserved in appearance.

There was, so it seemed also to the heir of Thornham, something aggressively protective in the manner in which the old diplomat held the daughter's arm in his own. He did not quite know why, but he did not like the manner any more than the man. Nevertheless, he shook hands with him politely, smothering any trace of what he felt or fancied, and led the way into the ball-room with Mrs Strangford.

When they had joined his mother, Lady Grace Digby, who was a daughter of the Earl of Fransham, his sister was standing next Mrs Strangford. Geoffrey rapidly exchanged a word with his handsome sister Grace. She was his only sister, two years older than himself, and they were tenderly devoted to each other.

"Grace," said he, "I want particularly to introduce you to that old man with Connie. I don't quite know why, but I don't like him, and I want you to help me to keep him away from her."

"Oh ! you jealous boy," laughed back Grace. "Why, they say he is making love to her mother !"

"Then why the dickens does he keep hold of Connie's arm in that unnecessary way ? Do you know him at all ?"

"No, I have never met him yet. Well, look here, Geoff, if you want to get rid of him introduce him to me. I'll make him come and dance the opening quadrille with me, treating him as one of the most important personages, you know, then you can get your Connie away, and keep her when you've got her as long as you can."

"Grace, you're a regular brick," said Geoff. "Come along then."

In a moment the Baronet was introduced to the

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daughter of his hostess, who, a second later, led him away with her successfully, thus giving her brother his opportunity to repossess himself of Connie.

As he marched off with her and felt the warm pressure of her arm upon his own he did not care for anything or anybody else in the world for the time being. For was she not his betrothed? Had they not at least always been to each other that indefinite something which is called in the country being more than half engaged?

Asserting his rights, he marched the really beautiful young lady back out of the ballroom, through the coffee-room, and into a corridor. Up the corridor he led her until he came to a little doorway which he opened and entered with her. Although it was dark, Miss Strangford did not stumble as she was ushered into what was the gallery at the back of the organ of the private chapel belonging to the old Hall. For often in years gone by she had been there before.

Once inside, Geoffrey closed the door.

"Now Connie, dear old Connie," he said, "to make up for lost time." And they made up for lost time, and then after some minutes of blissful silence marched back to the ballroom just as the first quadrille had commenced.

Geoffrey noticed that Mrs Strangford, who was dancing with the Earl of Fransham, looked rather severely at them as they entered, but what did he care? He felt as if he walked upon air, he danced internally for joy upon air! And although Connie met the sinister glance of the Baronet sliding her way with a searching look of disapproval, it is to be feared that neither did she care, for she was internally dancing for joy upon air also.

During that delightful evening Geoffrey had it all his own way with the acknowledged beauty of the county, and this was right and fitting, for was he not himself the hero of the occasion?

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Nevertheless, in spite of other delightful visits to the organ loft and other old hiding-places which these two had been wont to frequent together in former days, in spite, too, of the tenderness of Connie, the cup of his happiness was not made quite complete. For one thing Geoffrey could not succeed in doing—this was in making his dear Connie give him a definite promise to be his wife. That she longed to do so was evident, that, for some reason she dared not do so, or could not quite make up her mind to do so, was also made evident. Nevertheless, she fenced all round the question, giving him every kind of a promise which was not a definite one, promising in generalities, saying yes of course they must be married, that she longed to marry him, she only lived for him, had only lived for him all the time he had been away, that she had nearly died when she had heard that he was wounded, and many other dear and consoling things which were undoubtedly true.

But the whole truth she did not tell him, which was that her mother had, before coming, distinctly forbidden her to give him a definite promise, and, moreover, utterly distasteful as it was to her, she did not say that she knew her mother's reason.

Nevertheless, she fooled herself almost as much as Geoffrey that night, poor girl, when, during their last stolen interview, she burst into tears as she drew the handsome head down to hers and kissed the eyes she loved, while assuring him that she knew it would be all right soon ; in a day or two at latest she would be able to tell him that he could call her his affianced before all the world, that he could make arrangements to marry her in that very chapel wherein they then stood.

And so they left each other, straining each other to the heart in a fond embrace—an embrace which was, alas ! their last for ever.

For after the ball the rich old Baronet's diplomatic manners proved too much for the daughter, when backed up as they were by the persuasive eloquence of an ambitious mother.

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Thus, when Connie was purposely taken away to Norwich to be out of Geoffrey's reach, and then, when he wrote that he was coming to Norwich, spirited off at the Baronet's suggestion to London, the game, so far as Geoffrey was concerned, was lost. For Connie was now daily so clearly shown the advantages of a title, of wealth, of position, the folly of mere love with a young man of wandering habits just for love's sake, that by degrees she gave way, ever yielding more and more to the wiles of her ancient suitor. For he had already bought the mother, and when at length the fair young beauty was sold in turn by that mother into his arms, she did not go as an entirely unwilling sacrifice to be an old man's bride. She had, it is true, some foolish, vague idea that perhaps he would not live long, and that then, endowed with his wealth and title, she would be all the more acceptable to Geoffrey in a few years' time. How she wrote all this to the man who from early boyhood had thought of naught but her fair face, her endearing ways, Connie alone knew. But the letter that she sent him nearly broke his heart.

When, moreover, a few months after their marriage, Sir Reginald and his fair young wife came to live at Great Cressingham Hall, a place the Baronet had bought not ten miles from Thornham, Geoffrey's determination was made. Not all the prayers of his mother, not all the tears of his loving sister, not all the vigorous remonstrances from his grieved and disappointed father could shake that determination, which was to go back again to Canada to the backwoods of the primeval forest. There, with the beasts, the fishes and the trees for sole companions, would he make his home—no woman should come into his life. There, amid the Red Indians with whom he had already sojourned and warred, he would remain, never willingly consorting with white men, and vowing to set his eyes upon no white woman's face.

Sad and bitter was the parting with his mother and sister as he turned his back upon Thornham Hall; and

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deeper still the grief between father and son as they wrung each other's hands upon the floating dock at Liverpool.

And so Geoffrey sailed away to Quebec, while his family were left at home to mourn him almost as one dead. Meanwhile, the happiness that she had expected did not come to Connie, neither did it come to her mother. For the story became known, and so universally popular were the Digbys in Norfolk that public sympathy went with them, and a strong tide of disfavour set in against the Baronet and his young wife from the very first. Her former friend, Grace Digby, and her mother, refused to visit Constance, and when the wife and daughter of the popular Master of the Hounds took this step all the rest of the county families followed suit. As for Mrs Strangford, after her daughter's marriage none of her old friends would have anything to do with her. Moreover, to make things worse for the pair, Sir Reginald Carnforth was suddenly seized with an attack of paralysis which, while disabling him and rendering him almost speechless, did not kill him. Moreover, he was unable to be moved, and so lived on for years at Great Cressingham in this disabled condition. Thus were Mrs Strangford and her daughter, Lady Carnforth, unable to leave a county where they had no one to speak to and were universally detested.

CHAPTER II

STRIKE FOR THE UNION JACK

THE month of May was drawing to its close as the steamship *Bosnia* sailed out of the Mersey and, after touching at Moville in the north of Ireland, steered away for her ten days' trip across the Atlantic.

She was a vessel of only 4500 tons burthen, and was crowded with passengers, by whom Geoffrey Digby was soon voted an unsociable being. For, although for the first six days of the voyage the weather was clear and the sea fairly smooth, he never joined in any of the deck sports with his fellow-passengers, nor, when two rainy, squally days ensued, would he take part in the whist or poker parties or other amusements in the saloon.

From daylight to dark his occupation was ever the same. With a grim, impassive look upon his features the young man either paced up and down the deck or leaned over the taffrail looking ahead; he never looked back. He had secured a cabin to himself and so had no roommate to disturb his solitary thoughts. Many, however, some of whom indeed had met him before or heard of his deeds during the recent Riel Rebellion, strove to draw him into conversation. In this they failed signally. For, while polite and courteous to all who approached him, as he never originated a remark himself, the one-sided conversation naturally fell flat. Thus he was left alone to his meditations and interest in him subsided. The two squally days had been accompanied by strong head winds. There had been, moreover, although it was not realised at first, owing to the impossibility of taking sun observations, a strong sea current which had borne

Strike for the Union Jack

the *Bosnia* considerably to the northward of her course. Upon the ninth day, when the ship should have been well over the banks of Newfoundland and near the island of Anticosti in the Gulf of St Lawrence, there was a dense fog which occasioned considerable anxiety. The fog horn was kept sounding from morning till night and the engines were stopped, but as for twenty-four hours no answering fog horns were heard from other vessels the truth was guessed by all on board. Nevertheless, the fear of collision with some other ship was great. No one knew at what moment some huge form might appear looming up suddenly through the mist, only to be succeeded by an awful crash which might mean death to all on board. As a second day of impenetrable gloom succeeded, the gathering terror among the almost panic-stricken passengers increased. Their anxiety was however somewhat allayed upon this second day by the assurances of the ship's officers that, from the nature of the deep sea surroundings that were being made, they were sure of their position, which was well out of the track of other vessels ; moreover, that the time of year not being sufficiently advanced, there was no danger of collision with floating icebergs. The first of these well-meant assurances was false and only intended to allay alarm. The second was true. But neither one nor the other affected Geoffrey Digby in the least. Throughout the fog, as throughout the fair weather, he maintained his impassibility, paced up and down the deck and gazed ahead over the taffrail. There was no wind, but a heavy swell on the second of these days of foggy gloom which considerably increased the discomfort of all on board, the *Bosnia* rolling and lurching continuously, now on the summit, now in the hollow of the waves. Suddenly a sound was heard which thrilled every heart with terror. Over the windless sea was distinctly audible, and growing plainer and plainer, the dull roar of breakers dashing upon some rock-bound shore. The passengers were horror-stricken, and their blanched faces and wild, anxious questions plainly showed their fear. Nevertheless, there

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was no confusion among the crew, who, under the decisive orders of Captain Dalrymple, hove the lead, which, however, reached no bottom, cut adrift the lashings of the anchors ready to let go at a moment's notice, and removed the canvas coverings from the boats. In these this foreseeing commander had already, quietly during the previous night, caused to be stored both water and provisions. The falls of all the boats too had been previously secretly tested, to see that they would run clear at a moment's notice should they require to be lowered away. Indeed, without taking any steps openly which could alarm the crowd of human beings committed to his care, all that human foresight could do to avert unforeseen disaster had been done by this brave and praiseworthy sailor. Owing to his being known as a strict disciplinarian and his averseness to answering the foolish questions with which the ship's officers are so often needlessly beset by passengers, neither was Captain Dalrymple himself nor his first officer, Mr Crowquill, who followed his example, popular on board. The North Atlantic Steamship Company possessed, however, no more trustworthy servants than these two in the whole of their fleet.

Suddenly, without the least warning, while still the leads found no bottom and the sound of the breakers was distant, the ship struck with a horrible crunching upon a sunken rock. At the same moment the distant sound of a gun was heard reverberating through the fog-laden air. The captain alone instantly realised what it was. "That, Mr Crowquill, is the midday gun sounding at St Johns, Newfoundland; go and avert panic among the passengers and have the boats cleared away. I will see to the rest, the ship is not moving on the rocks. Only preserve order and there will be no danger of loss of life." There was already, had he but known it, danger of loss of life; for the shock of the ship striking had precipitated two persons overboard into the sea. One of these was Father Anthony, a Catholic priest, the other Lady McGeorge, the young and elegant

Strike for the Union Jack

wife of the General commanding the troops at Halifax, Nova Scotia, who was going out to join her husband. Lady McGeorge had been quite the smartest woman on board the *Bosnia*. Amid the general panic that prevailed one man saw their peril and heard their cries. Himself crying loudly, "Man overboard!" Geoffrey Digby plunged into the water. Although there was a slight surf now breaking against the ship's side, he seized the priest at once by his cassock, and urging him to remain still, swam with him to the side of the first boat that was lowered, in which he saw a lifebuoy, of which he possessed himself. Leaving the priest clinging to the gunwale of the boat, Geoffrey now swam away with the lifebuoy, striking out vigorously in the direction of the piteous cries which he heard coming from the lady as the current slowly bore her away. In a minute he was lost to the priest's sight in the gloom, and save those twain no one had marked the lady's fall into the sea.

Nevertheless, Geoffrey succeeded in reaching the almost choking woman in time. Seizing her from behind, to avoid her possible struggles, he pushed the lifebuoy in front of her while relinquishing it himself. Then when she had grasped it he remained beside her, encouraging her while treading water himself. Presently, seeing that she had become quite calm, and that he could approach her with safety, he contrived to do so, and to place the lifebuoy over her head. Then, with one hand upon it just to steady himself, he floated by her side and listened for the sound of oars of a boat coming to their deliverance. But no boat came, though plenty of other sounds were heard, steam whistles and cannon on the ship making the air hideous with their roarings. Fortunately the water was quite temperate, being from the Gulf Stream. Nevertheless, before long, Geoffrey noticed as they floated along that the lady's clothes were sadly dragging her down. She acknowledged as much when he asked her, but, being a plucky woman, now that she had recovered her breath and had her

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head above water, never gave way to despair and kept cool.

"Only hold on tight and never fear and we shall be saved," he murmured cheerfully. "You must get rid of these encumbrances. I have a knife and will cut your waistbands." In a moment he had done this and drawn away the clogging skirts which were dragging her down. Once her limbs were thus made free Lady McGeorge found that she was relieved indeed. "Can you swim?" asked Geoffrey.

"Only a little," replied the lady. "I am tired."

"A little will do. By God's providence I will pull you out of this mess. Help me to get rid of my waterproof and coat. Lean your elbows on the lifebuoy, and each time I say 'Now' give a pull at the sleeve."

"All right, I can do it."

"Now," said Geoffrey. "There!—now—again!"

The waterproof was off, and, after a moment's delay, the coat was sent to rejoin the other garments in the deep.

"That is ever so much better," said Geoffrey, as without assistance he easily divested himself of his waistcoat also. "Now to get rid of my shoes," he said. "I will give you my knife, and as I throw myself on my back will put up each foot in turn on the lifebuoy. Cut each string; I can kick them off! Bravely done," said the young man, a minute later, when both of his deck shoes had gone to the bottom of the sea.

Noticing that his companion was beginning to look distressed, he said again, "That coat—does it not tire you?" It was a loose coat richly trimmed with sables.

"It drags me down awfully."

"Then it must go also," said the young man; "but you must not attempt to pull it off or you will slip out of the lifebuoy. I must cut it off from behind. Throw your weight a little forward and keep your mouth closed." It took ten minutes at least to rip up the seams of the jacket from behind, for, husbanding his strength, Geoffrey rested between whiles.

Strike for the Union Jack

At length, however, it was ripped to pieces. The sleeves were ripped up, when the fragments of the beautiful sables fell away from the lissom young figure. Again she felt renewed buoyancy.

Half an hour had passed when Lady McGeorge said quite suddenly, "I have swallowed some water and my corsets are choking me. I am slipping away, I can hold on no longer. God bless you! I sink!" She threw up her arms and would have sunk through the centre of the lifebuoy to the bottom of the sea. Geoffrey, however, seized her by the knot of her hair and held her with her mouth well above water—her hat had gone long ago.

"Courage! courage! I will save you! Hear those distant guns—they are from the shore! There comes a puff of wind. The fog is lifting. Can you not see the shore?" Just then the lifebuoy rose upon a wave, and plainly and clearly were disclosed to their view high in air the two bold headlands which form the entrance to the harbour of St Johns. "The current is setting that way. Do you not see the flagstaff yonder with the Union Jack? A good omen, a British harbour. I will make you all right now, pull your courage together again. I must use my knife once more, then tie you for safety."

"I do feel my courage returning. But how will you tie me, you have no cord?"

"That is easy," replied Geoffrey. He had already unfastened the braces from his back and after first cutting loose the tight bodice and corset laces he bound his braces round her waist and fastened her with them to the little cords hanging round the lifebuoy.

"Now we are all right and are going to swim in earnest. I will push. Remain passive until you feel stronger; you can give a stroke at times. Strike towards that Union Jack. You cannot possibly sink, and soon you will be seen—and rescued."

"But you! who are lashed to no lifebuoy?"

"Never mind me, I shall live to see you through it," replied Geoffrey, doggedly. "Do not say another word, strike for the Union Jack; we must

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swim for our lives and save our breath." For at least another long hour after that did this young hero swim, slowly pushing the lifebuoy before him. Sometimes on the top of a wave he would, the fog having quite lifted, actually see the channel to the harbour of St John's between the jutting cliffs which guard its entrance. At others, sunk in the hollow between two seas, nothing was visible but the Union Jack fluttering on the summit of the coastguard signal staff. But, true Briton that he was, that beacon gave him hope. He saw the masts of ships now—even saw boats, but none came their way ! Still he struggled on and on, pushing the fair young form before him. A wave had lapped over her head occasionally and she was very still and inert. Another quarter of an hour elapsed ; it seemed a lifetime. But still no boat ! no boat ! and the Union Jack, although nearer, was now only seen at times and indistinctly, for the crest of the waves frequently lapped over the head of the engulfed swimmer also. He felt drowsy as his sight failed him. He thought vaguely of his mother, of his sister Grace, of the old Squire, of Connie in the old times in the organ loft. And then, as once or twice his hands lost their touch of the lifebuoy altogether, he vaguely remembered this young lady, whose body he could feel there somewhere, whom he had promised to save. Then with a sense of duty he struggled on, ever on, till his force was all spent. The crest of yet one more wave swept over him, he lost his hold of the lifebuoy, he could not find it again. The wave shut out the light of the sky from his eyes. The green water closed over him as he sank down, down. And this, then, was death !

CHAPTER III

UNDER THE WHITE ENSIGN

As Geoffrey came to the surface after sinking for the second time an excited priest in a dripping cassock sprang from a steam launch into the water and seized him. A moment later the sturdy arms of British bluejackets had pulled not only them into the launch but also the form of the lady, lashed to a lifebuoy with a pair of braces. She, like Geoffrey Digby, was almost divested of clothing and quite insensible ; indeed, they both appeared to the sailors to be dead.

Turning the two insensible forms upon their faces, so that the water might run out of their mouths, the gallant bluejackets, who, under the command of a young lieutenant, had strained every pound of steam in the engines to reach them in time, covered both up reverently with the white ensign which had been floating astern, then steamed swiftly for the battleship *Renown* lying in the harbour of St Johns. Before arriving there, however, a strange discovery had been made. Shortly after the inanimate forms had been dragged on board the steam launch and the task of disentangling the lady from the lifebuoy had been completed, a cry of horror sprang to the lips of Mr Montgomery, the sub-lieutenant in command. For upon his lifting the white ensign to inspect her features, no sooner were the wet masses of black hair gently brushed on one side from the pallid face of the lifeless woman than, despite the closed eyes and absence of all expression, the young naval officer recognised her. That limp, draggled being was none other than his own elder sister, Geraldine, whom he had

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never seen since her marriage, three years previously. And now to find her thus !

"Hurry, lads, hurry ! Full steam ahead to the ship," gasped the young man. "By Heaven ! this is my own sister ! But who, I wonder, is this gallant fellow who has so nobly risked his life for hers ?"

"He is, I believe, a Mr Digby !" exclaimed Father Antony, "and the young gentleman we were in search of who saved my life ; but who the lady was I did not know, as I did not see her face when she fell overboard. I will see if I detect signs of life in either," he continued, and tenderly leaning over and raising the ensign of St George he felt the heart of each in turn.

"I fear that God Almighty has called them to His rest," he exclaimed presently, rising sadly and making the sign of the Cross over each. "His will be done !"

"Please God as they bean't dead, begging your Reverence's pardon," here ejaculated Muirhead, the coxswain of the launch, touching his hat with one hand as he steered with the other ; "and you, Mr Montgomery, don't lose heart, sir. Many's the drowned man that looked as dead as them as I've seen brought round again. Why, here's Bill Jenkins, sittin' alongside me, as looked just like that when we picked him up that night in the Bay o' Fundy."

"Ay, ay, sir," chimed in Bill Jenkins, "I was just as dead as that, sir, an' look at me now ! They pulled me through, sure enough, so there's hopes for they, God bless 'em !"

"Pray God you may only be right, my good fellows," replied Harry Montgomery, wiping away the tears which, despite all his fortitude, rolled silently down his awe-stricken cheek ; "here, Jenkins, lend a hand, we'll turn them gently from side to side—that's the way."

"There's a deal o' water coming out ; raise them a bit brisker sir ; and you, your Reverence, begging your pardon, press their chesties a bit, the more water as runs out the more chance o' life," here intervened the coxswain once more. But all the efforts of those in the

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launch were useless to restore consciousness. Presently, when they ran the launch alongside the flagship *Renown*, there was medical help ready and waiting. As Mr Montgomery, springing quickly up the gangway, saluted the first lieutenant with the usual report of, "Come on board, sir," he added, "a lady and gentleman both drowned, I fear, sir, and the lady is my own sister, Lady McGeorge."

"Good God!" ejaculated the elder of a group of officers standing by the gangway. "Hats off, gentlemen!" It was the Admiral, the famous old fighting Sir Arthur. "Forward, lads, with the stretchers," ordered the first lieutenant; "the surgeons are in attendance, sir, and all is in readiness below. Where shall we remove them to?" he added, addressing the white-haired Admiral, who, cap in hand like the rest, looked anxiously down into the launch.

"Remove the poor things to my state saloon, and be careful there, my lads, lift them gently," ordered the old Admiral.

"And you, Mr Montgomery, would no doubt wish to accompany me there with the doctors and the hospital hands?" he added considerably.

Gently but speedily the two inanimate figures were carried up the gangway on the stretchers, every officer and man standing at attention and bareheaded as they were carried across the quarter-deck and below to the Admiral's saloon astern.

Meanwhile, the dripping Father Antony, who, quite forgetful of himself, was turning to accompany the mournful procession, attracted the Admiral's attention.

"Who is this clergyman, Mr Montgomery?" he inquired as they moved along.

"We found him in a boat, sir, coming from the wreck of the *Bosnia*, when he hailed us and asked us to take him in search of this gallant gentleman, whom he said, after first saving his life, had swum off into the fog after my sister with a lifebuoy. And he sprang into the water himself to seize the drowning man, who was

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sinking as we neared him, although I don't believe that he can swim. I do not know the clergyman's name though, sir, I have not asked him."

"Gallant deeds, if some scarcely wise ones, have been done to-day, and I see that you are worthy of your cloth, Father," said the Admiral. "Give me your hand, sir, and tell me your name, which it will be an honour to learn," continued the courtly old gentleman.

"They call me Father Antony and I am a missionary among the Indians," returned the Padre. "Since God's mercy and that poor young man's bravery have spared me to continue my labours I trust that you will allow me to attend and give such poor help as is in my power to my preserver—should there still be life in him?"

The Admiral halted while the stretcher-bearers passed below.

"No, sir, not until you have been cared for yourself, for you look in need of some stimulant and must have a change of clothing at once. I will send for Mr McTavish, our chaplain, who will take care of you, and we will find you a berth on board if you will favour me by considering yourself my guest for the present."

So when Mr McTavish, who was standing close by, came up the worthy Padre was handed over into his care, and shortly afterwards, to the amusement of the onlooking bluejackets, the Roman Catholic missionary was seen issuing from that clergyman's cabin attired in the ordinary garb of a minister of the Church of England. Had not the occasion been such a solemn one the worthy Father would have been one of the first to smile at his travesty himself. As it was, having been brought up in the school of Jesuits, it was by no means the first time that he had assumed a disguise. For he held that any garb was a good one so that it was assumed for a right-ful object. Thus, his choice having been between a suit of plain clothes, offered him by the first lieutenant, and a suit of Anglican raiment, which was all that Mr McTavish had to offer, Father Antony had selected the latter as more befitting to his calling. Having also been

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fortified by a strong dose of brandy, which had quite restored him after his immersion, he now proceeded to Sir Arthur's state saloon. Here he found, to his grief, that, despite all the efforts of the surgeons, Mr Digby had as yet shown no sign of life, although, in the case of Lady McGeorge, after the prescribed rules for the aid of those dying from drowning had been vigorously applied for nearly an hour, the faintest flutter of the heart had just been perceived.

Finding that his preserver's case was about to be abandoned as hopeless by the worn-out workers, Father Antony asked if he might be permitted to lend a hand. He had, he said, once seen a method tried among the Indians for restoring consciousness, which was, he believed, quite unknown among the medical profession in Europe, and it had then been tried with success.

Having received the required permission, the Padre went to work with a will. He was a wiry, muscular man, and he strove hard indeed to restore the life of the man who had rescued him, bending the body backwards and forwards with repeated action, until he was almost exhausted in his attempts to induce respiration. At length, with a cry of delight, the good man declared to the hospital attendant assisting him that he had heard a sigh. Redoubling their efforts, a few minutes later a looking-glass applied to the lips of the man apparently for so long dead disclosed to view distinctly a slight film upon its surface. There was no doubt of the matter. Geoffrey Digby had at length been recalled to life from the shades in which his soul had been wandering, although his new life was as yet but a very feeble flicker.

To the immense joy of her brother, Geraldine McGeorge, after the first heart beats had been felt, had continued her recovery quickly. Her respiration now came distinctly and regularly, there was also a faint glow of colour returning to her pallid cheeks. Moreover, the blood commenced flowing from a wound not previously noticed in the back. The surgeons an-

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nounced her life as saved, whereupon she was rolled up in blankets and installed in the Admiral's own bed. It was an hour later, however, before they could give an equally satisfactory report of the man to whom she owed her continued existence in the land of the living.

CHAPTER IV

THE EFFICACY OF PRAYER

By the following morning Lady McGeorge had sufficiently recovered to have been able to rise betimes, save for a slight difficulty, which had been quite overlooked by the good-hearted naval officers. This was that she had no clothes. For although the position of the wreck was no worse than it had been on the previous day, the sea had got up a bit, and the surf breaking over the *Bosnia* prevented any salvage operations from being carried on. Thus none of the passengers' baggage could be got at when Harry Montgomery went off to the stranded vessel with a party of bluejackets from the flagship to lend a hand to Captain Dalrymple and his crew, who had also revisited the scene of their misfortune.

Hearing, upon her brother's return, of his fruitless errand, Lady McGeorge was none the less impatient to rise and visit the bedside of the man who had saved her, of whose condition she had a bad report from the ship's surgeon.

It was the gallant old Admiral who came to her assistance. Visiting her, with her brother, as she lay in her berth, in a fatherly manner he expressed his delight at her restoration to life from a watery grave. When Geraldine McGeorge had in turn expressed her heartfelt thanks for his great kindness, she explained to him, half comically, the trouble that she was in.

"You see my difficulty, Sir Arthur. I have got not a thing to put on. At this very moment the only garments I wear consist of a shirt and under vest of my

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brother's, and they are oceans too big for me. Look how Harry's things become a lady!" Holding out her arms, the Admiral could not help laughing as he saw that the articles in question exceeded by the whole length of the cuff the fair arms they enclosed.

"Then, Sir Arthur, there is something else to be considered. Do you know that I have actually not got a single hairpin? Can't you do something for me?" And whimsically Lady McGeorge raised her pretty head and shook her black tresses at the Admiral, and very *espiègle* the gallant old boy thought she looked as she did so.

"Hum—ha," he replied, "I could hardly say how we could select clothes on shore. Still, as the sea is now going down, I daresay we may be able to rescue your own by some time in the afternoon; but then you will have to wait in bed, you know, and you say you want to get up at once. Really, how impatient you young ladies are!"

"No, Sir Arthur, you malign me, it is not ordinary feminine impatience which makes me want to rise, although I confess I am impatient enough at times—but it is something more. Do you know"—she seized his hand—"that that poor young gentleman who saved my life, and almost lost his own in doing it, that man who swam after me in the fog and who stuck to me gallantly in that horrible ocean"—she shuddered—"that horrible ocean, for hours, is terribly ill, awfully weak, they say, and rambling at times, and I may never see him to thank him. I must see him. I must watch over him? I am a woman, he wants a woman to nurse him, to do all those little things which you kind, brave men cannot do for each other, don't you understand? Oh! do help me somehow to get up at once and go to him. You know I am all right save for a bit of a cut on the back from his knife when he cut my things off so cleverly, and that is nothing. Only suggest something, give me something, your own dressing-gown will do—if Admirals at sea have dressing-gowns, that is," and she smiled inquiringly.

The Efficacy of Prayer

The Admiral rose to the occasion.

"I can do better than the Admiral's dressing-gown," said Sir Arthur, laughing. "What about the flag-midshipman's outfit? If you don't mind asking my signal-midshipman yourself, I am sure he would give you anything you wanted."

"Oh! send for him—send for him at once! How tall is he?" cried Lady McGeorge, jumping at the idea.

"Here, Montgomery, just step forward and ask Mr Conway to come here," said the Admiral. "We'll see if he cannot oblige your sister. I should think he could soon turn her into a boy."

Five minutes later a slim young lad with rosy cheeks, which become rosier still as he entered, stood in the Admiral's cabin. "This is Mr Conway, Lady McGeorge. Now you ask the young gentleman what you want and I will answer for it he will be delighted to give you anything or everything down to a pair of shoes. Won't you, my lad?" inquired Sir Arthur. Delighted indeed was the young gentleman. Blushingly he said that he would supply the shipwrecked lady with a complete set of midshipman's attire—"all except a pair of braces that is; I have broken my second pair," he added naïvely. "Never mind the braces, I see the pair with which I was lashed to the lifebuoy hanging over that chair!" exclaimed Lady McGeorge. "Thank you, thank you, Mr Conway. Oh! please get me your things at once, and I shall be eternally grateful to you."

The result of this arrangement was that half an hour later as pretty a girl-midshipman as ever was seen on the stage of a theatre—even the long black hair having been arranged somehow—was to be seen leaning over the couch upon which lay Geoffrey Digby. She found him quite unconscious, rambling at times in a low muttering manner.

Installing herself by his bedside, Geraldine McGeorge never left it all day. The erstwhile smart lady soon proved to the ship's surgeons that although transmogrified to a midshipman she had all the skill of a hospital nurse.

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She added to her attentions the tenderness of a sister in her care of this brave fellow. As the day wore on his rambling utterances became more distinct. The only name which she heard, however, was Connie, and Connie was often repeated, sometimes happily, but more often bitterly, reproachfully.

As, under his nurse's tender care, during the rest of that and the following day, Geoffrey Digby's bodily strength gradually returned, his mind seemed still to remain entirely unhinged. The shock of the immersion, coming on top of the long period of self-repression, appeared to have entirely obliterated all consciousness of the past or the present from his mind, save in so far as the past related to Constance Strangford.

Upon the afternoon of the second day Geoffrey became feverish, and mistaking his nurse for his faithless love, spoke plainly and volubly to her, reproaching her for her infidelity. Becoming almost frightened at times, Lady McGeorge sent for Father Antony to keep her company. Although her brother often came to her when his duties permitted him to do so, she considered that it would be unfair to her preserver to allow any one living save herself and the priest to hear the secrets of his soul thus laid bare.

Her pity for Geoffrey was so great that as she vainly strove to soothe him the tears came to her eyes.

"Poor fellow!" she said to the priest when, late on that second afternoon after a storm of denunciation, their patient had sunk back upon his pillows exhausted. "Oh! what can we two, who owe our lives to him, do to restore his peace of mind? He never sleeps, and the doctor says he will have brain fever if he gets no rest soon, and if he has brain fever he will surely die. Oh! how I wish that I had that Connie here," Lady McGeorge continued viciously. "I'd send her adrift without even a lifebuoy, although drowning would be too good for a woman who has brought a noble fellow to this condition of mind. I hope she'll come to a bad end! I feel as though she were my personal enemy.

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And now she's married—you heard her name—Father, and well—I shall—”

“Hush-sh, my dear young lady,” said the good priest. “Do not harbour evil thoughts, they will not help our mutual preserver. Rather, since you ask me what you and I can do for him, join me in prayer. Are you a believer in Christ?”

“Good Father Antony, I fear,” returned Lady McGeorge somewhat shamefacedly, “that I was far more of an atheist than a believer in either Christ or a God of any sort until my recent great peril. The teachings of the world—reason, science, experience—had all seemed to convince me that there was no God—no Saviour possible of poor humanity.”

“But in your great peril, my daughter—when this noble fellow was for hours supporting you, when, at the risk, the utter peril of his life, he, after first abandoning his hope of safety in the boat to which he had conveyed me, accompanied you, encouraged you, kept you from sinking, what did you do then?”

“In that great peril, Father, I prayed as I had never prayed before for both him and for myself.”

“And whom did you pray to, my daughter?”

“I prayed to God to save us for Christ's sake as I had been taught to do in the days before I became an unbeliever.”

“Well, your prayers were you see answered, so far as you yourself were concerned—God saved you as He saved me. Now then, let us together on our knees here by this young man's bedside pray once more to God for Christ's sake—pray as we never prayed before. Let us return Him our united thanks for His great mercies vouchsafed to us, and let us implore Him, earnestly and long, for the life of this man who, a stranger to us, has preserved to us both our being, our power to pray. Are you willing, my daughter, to join me?”

“Both willing and ready, Father Antony.”

Together by the couch knelt the strangely-assorted couple. The Roman Catholic priest, in the garb of a

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minister of the Church of England, and the woman of the world in the uniform of a midshipman. Half an hour later, as the Admiral, accompanied by Lieutenant Montgomery, came quietly to the doorway of the saloon, they beheld this strange sight.

And as the priest prayed fervently aloud, the lady repeating each sentence after him, both earnestly begging for the life of Geoffrey Digby, the onlookers were surprised by a stranger sight still. For presently they saw rise from the couch, and gaze with great astonishment at the two heads bowed before him, the sick man. And, moreover, they perceived that his eyes were no longer the eyes of a man out of his senses, but those of a man calm and sane as themselves.

The worthy priest was ending his prayer with the words, "In life or death, O God, we thank thee for all thy mercies. Amen!" when to the great joy of the worshippers the words were distinctly repeated after him, in unison with Lady McGeorge, by the man for whom they were praying.

Their prayer had been accepted—and answered.

CHAPTER V

A BOND OF SYMPATHY

ALTHOUGH as the weather calmed down sufficiently it was found possible to tow the *Bosnia* off the rock and into the harbour of St Johns, any thought of continuing the passage in her was out of the question. The whole of the cargo and stores had been removed unhurt, thus all the passengers who had taken such refuge as they could on shore were able to obtain their property, while the rescued trio on board the flagship recovered their goods and chattels also. All the limited places of accommodation in the town being already crowded to overflowing, and there being no steamers available in which to continue the voyage to Quebec, the Admiral insisted upon the three who had been saved from a watery grave remaining on board the *Renown* until that ship and other men-of-war should go to the St Lawrence at some time within the next month.

After Geoffrey first recovered his senses, to see a young midshipman with a woman's face and a clergyman, whose features were quite unremembered by him, praying earnestly by his bedside, it was considerably more than a week before he was strong enough to rise. There were indeed anxious moments during the first few days in which he suffered serious relapses. But still Lady McGeorge nursed him faithfully and Father Antony sat by his bedside for hours, to relieve her when he could induce her to allow him to do so. As she found him slowly growing stronger, Geraldine McGeorge, who had taken a great personal interest in her patient apart from the gratitude which she owed him, en-

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deavoured, womanlike, to draw his confidences to herself. She felt that there was a bond between them such as can rarely exist among people in this world, and she sought to improve upon it, for there was a charm and gentleness about Geoffrey which filled her with sympathy. His manners were so courteous and kind, he seemed so genuinely grateful for any little attention, that she found it a pleasure greater by far to sit by his bedside than to promenade on the quarter-deck or pay visits to the town of St Johns with the Admiral, or with any of the younger officers. All of these, however, were only too anxious, now that for once in their lives they had actually got a lady, and a handsome lady too, on board a man-of-war, to vie with each other in seeking her society. Oddly enough, although hitherto Lady McGeorge had been considered lively and fond of flirtation, of all the naval officers whose companionship she occasionally accepted there was none to whom she showed so much partiality as the little midshipman who had rigged her out with a suit of clothes. Thus while his seniors—captain, commander, lieutenants, and the other and bigger middies—were quite jealous of the signal-midshipman, he, as he strutted up and down the deck by her side with his telescope under his arm, was puffed out to twice his natural size by the pride of the situation. Quite unnecessarily, too, did young Conway point out to her objects and signals to be observed through his spy-glass merely for the pleasure of holding it for her, while she leant the arms which he was proud to think had worn his clothes upon his shoulders. He enjoyed himself thoroughly upon these occasions. Moreover, the young monkey made them last as long as possible by giving her the glass out of focus at first; this he did especially whenever he saw the flag-lieutenant, whom he particularly hated, observing them. There was, he found, one object upon which he could never lay the telescope too often to please Lady McGeorge. This was the Union Jack on the coastguard flagstaff. While gazing one day long

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and earnestly upon this emblem of Britain's might—so long that the signal midshipman, who thought that she must be counting the threads in the bunting, had ample time to enjoy his glory—Geraldine lived over again those thrilling moments when the encouraging voice of the man behind her had said, "Strike for the Union Jack." She remembered too the moments preceding it, when the kindly hand had cut away her clinging garments ; she well remembered, above all, the sharp dig of the knife, which she had received as he had severed the laces of her corsets. She had not winced at the time although the point of the blade was keen, and now, she scarcely knew why, she somehow hoped that the scar would never heal, that she might always be able to feel the cicatrice, or see it in the glass. This thought reminded her that she was staying too long away from her charge. She closed the telescope, gave it back to young Conway and hurried below.

And while the flag-lieutenant, under whose especial orders was the signal midshipman, was taking particular pains to make things lively for that young gentleman on deck, just to take the conceit out of him, she quietly seated herself by Geoffrey's bedside and soothed his still burning brow with her cool, delicate hand.

It seemed strange to her to observe how completely all the strength had been taken out of the well-knit frame of this young man, which had been a frame of iron even at the date of the shipwreck, or never could she and the lifebuoy have been pushed forward for hours towards that Union Jack. More strange to her seemed the actual cause of this complete breaking down, which she accurately judged to have been created by the pangs of ill-requited love more than by the apparent state of death from drowning in which Geoffrey Digby had lain for so long. She wondered, as she bathed his forehead with eau de Cologne, how it was that the brain below it could dwell for so long or so vividly upon the pangs caused by a worthless woman, one unworthy to be loved by such a noble fellow, of whose gallant deeds

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during the Riel Rebellion in the North-West his nurse had now learned. And she felt, yes, in spite of the preaching of Father Antony, she still felt she would willingly have sent that woman adrift without a lifebuoy as a punishment for her crimes.

While Lady McGeorge took so keen an interest in her patient, while she sought, although vainly at first, to draw his confidences towards her, she was grieved—it may be confessed slightly piqued—at the entire lack of interest which he took in her own personality, one which she was accustomed hitherto to find that all considered charming. It had been several days before he even asked her name, when she had replied, Geraldine McGeorge. Never had he inquired if she was married or single, merely calling her “my kind nurse.” He would not suffer her to thank him for saving her from death, and did not seem to think that there was any particular importance in having so saved her individual self. It might, she thought, have been any woman, no matter whom, it would have been all the same to him. He would have saved her just the same, and been just as well contented. The realisation of this fact gave Geraldine a little pang at the heart. It may have been disappointed pride, she did not quite know what it was, but it hurt.

Finding that he took no particular interest in her she this day strove to create one. She told him therefore who she was; that her brother it had been whose boat had picked them both up; that she was married to a man thirty years older than herself. It had been her father’s wish, she said, and she had obeyed, her father and her husband having been old brother officers in the Guards together.

While the fact of her brother having picked him up, or the fact of his having been saved at all, did not seem in the least to interest Geoffrey, who, having died to all intents and purposes, evidently wished that he had stopped dead—this last piece of information did, to her satisfaction, seem to interest him.

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It was a satisfaction, however, which was short lived, Lady McGeorge noticing that Geoffrey was more reticent with her even than before after he had learned that she was married to a man thirty years older than herself. A kind of thought wave, coming from his brain to hers, which felt in unison with his, told her the reason. She knew instantly, as well as if he had said it, that he was now classing her with his own faithless Connie, that he deemed her equally unworthy, since she too had married an elderly man for name, position or wealth. Instantly the nurse felt—she knew not quite why—that she was under some necessity of explanation, of self-excuse, to Geoffrey Digby.

Not knowing what impelled her, she exclaimed in a low but earnest tone, "No, I am not as bad as your Connie. I did not love another man. I was not beloved by a true and trusting spirit."

"My Connie! What do you know about my Connie?" asked the sick man, feverishly. "I have never mentioned her. She is not mine either!"

This was indeed the first time that that name had been mentioned since Geoffrey had recovered consciousness, but having broken the ice thus unintentionally Lady McGeorge was glad of being able to plunge deep into the hole. Here indeed was at last the opportunity of gaining the confidence that she so eagerly sought.

Taking Geoffrey's feverish hand in both of hers, to prevent its nervous twitching, Geraldine now told him of his delirium, of how she had kept all away from the bedside saving Father Antony, and that his secret was safe with them.

Then, with an infinite gentleness, she besought him, for his own good, for the sake of his own peace of mind, to treat her like a sister—or, she smiled—"an old mother confessor," and tell her all—pour out his soul to her—and thus lift all the weight and burden oppressing him from his bosom.

"In me, my dear friend, my saviour, you see a grateful woman who will never cause you pain, who will never

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grieve you by dwelling on or recurring to the subject of your trials again. Remember, you gave me all I now have—my life. I, in return, will give you a life of sympathy if you trust in me, lean on me. Thus a lifelong bond of kindness will be between us. I will encourage you, I will help you. Far or near, you will be able to think of me as knowing that I share the weight of your pain, that your burden is no longer borne alone. I, Geraldine McGeorge, the woman whom you saved from death, will strive to make you feel that you have not saved her for nothing, but saved her—my poor, broken-hearted boy—to be a help, a comfort to yourself.” She paused a moment, and no thought save unselfish ones and good were in her mind as she added, “Now, do you accept what I offer?”

The strong, stubborn heart of the young man was melted. The tears were in his eyes as, putting up his arm, he drew gently down to him the beautiful face, then said, “My kind nurse, I accept the sweet gift of your sympathy, I will give to you my confidence. I feel that what you say is true—your sympathy may save my brain. The accident which ordained that we all but died together has doubtless also ordained that there should be a bond of confidence between us, given and accepted by one and the other in all honour.”

With the black tresses almost brushing Geoffrey’s cheek, with her expressive eyes gazing steadily, thoughtfully, almost tenderly into his, Geraldine remained a moment. She seemed hesitating, debating within herself as she looked deep into those blue eyes so calmly meeting her own.

Whatever she found, whatever she missed, and she found or missed something, the delicate organism of the fibres of her soul were touched by it upon some unseen key. Scarcely did she know herself if the faint re-echo of the music was a harmony or a discord. At length she sighed. “Ah—h,” a long-drawn sigh. Then repeating his own words, “In all honour,” she firmly pressed the hand that she held. It was but a bond of sympathy

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which had been sealed, and all that it brought were the unrestrained confidences of a young fellow. Yet, as the hours passed by, and still the nurse sat by the patient, a happier air, one almost of contentment, seemed to overspread the flushed and feverish features of the latter.

Noticing the good that her prescription was already doing, despite a momentary sadness at learning Geoffrey's idea of going to bury himself for life in the backwoods among the Indians, the nurse became gay, a load seemed lifted from her mind, she had done good indeed in taking this weight of confidence upon her, her heart felt joyful.

When all the story was ended, when all the past was unravelled and there was no more to say, Lady McGeorge spoke brightly and confidently to Geoffrey about his future. She did not fall into the error of endeavouring directly to combat his ideas. On the contrary, she commended his idea of leading a life as a hunter and trapper, of entirely neglecting the society of all white faces, especially those of all fair women. But she merely suggested one little amelioration of his scheme.

"When, my dear friend, your powder and shot is exhausted, when—no matter how utterly distasteful to you all society may still remain—the want of supplies will drive you, as it must do at times, back into a town, then you must always remember our bond of union, first drawn up when you held me from sinking in those dreadful waves, and signed to-day, and for a time come back to me."

Since it seemed that Geoffrey Digby scarcely now looked upon her as ought save a kind impersonal friend, one indeed of no definite sex, it would appear from these words almost as if Geraldine McGeorge wished him for ever to forget that she too was a woman—one with a fair face. But had she, in her devotion to his interests, her ardent desire for his happiness, entirely forgotten that fact herself? Ah! who can say?

CHAPTER VI

GEOFFREY'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS

OWING to the measures which the Admiral instituted for blasting away the unknown rock upon which the *Bosnia* had been stranded, the departure of the flagship from St Johns was delayed for a period longer than at first intended. During this delay Geoffrey completely recovered; his restoration to health dating visibly, much to her satisfaction, from the day when he had laid bare the inner recesses of his soul to Geraldine McGeorge. No sooner was he able to get about than he became a universal favourite with all on board; especially did Harry Montgomery look upon him as a hero worthy of imitation in all respects. Yet so great was his natural modesty and reserve that, even in the conviviality of the evening pipe and glass of grog, the naval officers found great difficulty in extracting from him any details as to his exploits, either during his recent experiences in the North-West, or in the pursuit of big game in many lands during the four years previous to the recent rebellion of the Indians and half-breeds under Riel. Nevertheless that, young as he was, he had already been a mighty hunter became known. For such is the fraternity of sport among Englishmen that he became gradually drawn out as regards his hunting experiences, until his adventures, although he always made light of their dangerous side, were the envy of his listeners.

The fact was that as "the poet is born not made," so had Geoffrey Digby been a hunter born. From his earliest childhood his instincts had been those of his primeval

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ancestors who had lived by the capture or destruction of fish, fowl and *feræ naturæ*. He was, moreover, a naturalist of a high order, who understood not only the habits of all wild creatures but their genus, species and anatomy. Nor was he unacquainted with botany or geology—indeed, all subjects having to do with the woods and fields were at his fingers' ends.

Even quite as a child at Thornham, long before most children are allowed to run about alone, he had been the terror of his governesses, who could never keep him in control. Despite the earnest recommendations of his doting mother not to let the child out of her sight, so surely as the anxious young instructress's back was turned for a second the little boy would disappear. With the stealthiness of the Red Indian he would slip off into the woods in search of birds' eggs or butterflies, frequently secreting himself high up in the branches of some mighty tree while his distracted preceptress, accompanied by his sister Grace, wandered about below calling his name in vain. Nor could many whippings cure him. As he grew a little older his bed would often be found untenanted when his mother visited it late at night. Then it was probably discovered that the little lad was out watching rabbit snares, that he had set himself with skill worthy of a poacher. Locking him in his room was found to be of no use, for young Geoffrey climbed down from the window by a water-spout or the ivy on the wall. When his room was changed to one with no ivy or water-spout adjacent, the boy secreted a knotted rope under the mattress of his bed in the daytime, to climb down by it at night.

For these delinquencies his father gave him a few good floggings and sent him to school. At school, although he did well at his lessons, he was frequently in trouble for being absent—as usual hunting something. He also got into trouble for trespassing on private grounds or tickling trout in preserved waters.

When he grew bigger and came home for the holidays he not only learned to shoot but, almost as soon as he

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could lift a gun to his shoulder, was found to be a dead shot.

As for trapping vermin, the head keeper declared to his father one day, when the youth was barely fourteen, "Master Geoffrey he du fare to kill a rare sight o' varmint, that he du, Squire. I'll lay a guinea that he hev killed more cats an' stoats an' weasels in these here Easter holidays o' his than me and Sam Adcock and Billy Eves ha' killed among us all t' year."

By this time, moreover, he had given up tickling trout, and there being a fine stream running past the ruins of Castle Acre Abbey, not far away from Thornham, his father obtained permission from its noble owner for the lad to learn to fly fish in it. Now it was that his natural aptitude for the rod came in. Although he had never seen a line cast upon water in his life, Master Geoffrey had had as schoolfellow a Scotch lad, older than himself, from whom he had received a certain amount of oral instruction. It was one day when they were out together, shooting at an obnoxious farmer's sheep with bows and arrows—for which they were severely punished—that young Dundas had first disclosed to him the delights of fly fishing and its superiority over tickling, or, as he called it, "guddling" trout. The farmer pursued them just then, but when they had temporally eluded him, it was with a slender wand and a long piece of string that Geoffrey took his first lesson in casting the fly, aiming at a daisy to practise precision. His next holidays, when he had an opportunity of fishing for real trout instead of daisies, he struck at first so hard when the big fellows rose at his fly that, with the coarse gut that he used, he either dragged them straight out of the water, or else, to his chagrin, found that he had torn off the upper lip, which remained sticking on his hook while the trout remained in the stream. It was not long, however, before these little defects were remedied, with a result which soon proved fatal to himself. For during the following fishing season an old clergyman, who alone had for years enjoyed the privilege of fishing the delight-

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ful stream, happened upon several occasions to be in the vicinity of Castle Acre Abbey when the young son of the Squire of Thornham was on the water. And, as bad luck would have it, upon each of these occasions, whereas the hoary-headed man of God had only two or three small trout in his own creel, he found Geoffrey with a basket full of speckled beauties, all large ones and including fish of two pounds in weight. Not at all understanding the reason of the lad's extraordinary success, the jealous old boy at once wrote off to the noble Earl that Geoffrey Digby must certainly be poaching the water with worms and that he had better be looked after ! As a matter of fact the reverend gentleman had much maligned young Digby. What was the real cause of his success consisted in the fact that he had thus early discovered for himself the art of using a dry fly and of carefully stalking his fish. In any case the result for the boy was the same, Geoffrey having been restricted for the future to two days in the season upon the coveted waters.

He only fished the stream for one season after that, but when he did so he contrived upon his two days to get level with his traducer. For weeks he visited the banks of the river before he fished it, carefully then spotting the lie of the big fish in every hole and corner. At such times he would leave his rod uncased and ready for use in the charge of the water-bailiff, an old friend whom he often tipped—which the parson never did—and who accordingly sympathised with him completely. Then when the water-bailiff, who was on the watch, saw the clergyman coming to the river side, he hurried to the lad with his rod and gave him warning. Geoffrey in the meantime had been studying the flies upon the water and marked where the biggest fish were rising. Therefore, before even his ancient enemy had got his tackle together, the boy contrived to let him see him land one or two splendid trout, while by the end of the day—well, the parson himself had better be left to finish that story—no layman could do it proper justice.

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In addition to these varied accomplishments, it is not to be supposed that Geoffrey Digby was the son of the Master of the Hounds without knowing how to ride. He had a fine seat and light hands upon a horse, and rode as straight as a die. His father had indeed every cause to be proud of his youthful heir from the day when, according to the old Norfolk custom, his face was "blooded" with the recently severed brush of the first fox of which he had managed to be in at the death.

It is no wonder that, having no cause to enter a profession, a young man with tastes such as these should have sought frequent opportunities of travel in search of sport so soon as ever he had left college, which he did very early. Geoffrey's father had not sought to thwart him, with the result that, young as he was, Geoffrey had already killed boars and tigers in India, lions in Abyssinia, elephant, buffalo and rhinoceros in East Africa, and bison, bears and wolves in Canada. Moreover, although not yet quite twenty-five years of age, he had already found time for a salmon fishing expedition to Newfoundland and had explored its rivers thoroughly. When the Admiral heard of this, he was delighted. For fighting Sir Arthur was among other things a most ardent and enthusiastic angler, although not a very scientific wielder of the trout rod. Nevertheless he adored a salmon and all pertaining to one, and now found to his immense satisfaction that he had here ready to his hand the very man who could tell him, far better than the natives of the island, the best places to visit in pursuit of his favourite sport. There was no railway in Newfoundland in those days. The rivers, therefore, running as they do entirely through wild, uncultivated lands of forest and marsh, could only be visited with hopes of success by those having both means and time at their command. For either the sea voyage or the terribly hard journey through the bush, having to be undertaken to reach each one in succession, might only result in a disappointment in each stream, owing to the varying habits of the fish which, in Newfoundland, frequent different parts of the

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almost inaccessible waters at different seasons of the year.

The knowledge of this fact, coupled with the difficulty of obtaining accurate information at St Johns, it was which had hitherto debarred the Admiral from indulging in his favourite relaxation. Now, however, all difficulties would be cleared away. Sir Arthur, by instructions which arrived from home, found that it would be necessary for him, before proceeding to the coast of Canada, to visit various small villages and settlements on the coasts and inlets of Newfoundland. For the eternal "French Shore Question" was then, as for the past hundred years, agitating the brains of puzzle-headed politicians in Paris and London. There was then, indeed, no probability of its being ever settled until after the next war between England and France. In the meantime a man-of-war had from time to time to go through the form of visiting the poverty-stricken fishermen of both nationalities, while its commander had to repeat the old and well-tried farce of inquiring into their respective quarrels and grievances, and reporting thereon. Sir Arthur therefore determined to combine business with pleasure and, under the leadership of the man so recently saved from drowning, to make a real and determined onslaught upon the *salmo salar* of Newfoundland.

Nor, since he had learned that the trout in its waters were most unsuspicious and confiding, did he intend to neglect them. For who can entirely despise splendid *fontinalis* running at times up to six pounds in weight!

CHAPTER VII

FATHER ANTONY'S FAREWELL GIFT

ALTHOUGH there was no railway in Newfoundland and passenger steamers came and went irregularly, yet, the electric cable being already in existence, Lady McGeorge had been able at once to communicate with her husband in Halifax. Having duly assured him of her safety and whereabouts, she did not evince any great anxiety at the delay which kept her a guest upon the man-of-war. On the contrary, although had she been extremely anxious to continue her journey she would have been able to do so by small coasting craft, her terror of the sea in anything but a large and solid ship, coupled with the unexpected pleasure of being able for a time to enjoy her brother's society, quite overbalanced in her mind the inconvenience of delay in proceeding to Nova Scotia. Therefore, when Sir Arthur asked her to continue a while longer as his guest, promising eventually to land her, not at Quebec but at Halifax itself, she was pleased to remain on board the *Renown*, especially as her host was planning some camping-out expeditions which he asked her to grace with her presence.

Geoffrey Digby, who was perfectly indifferent as to whether he remained in Newfoundland or proceeded direct to the backwoods of Canada, in which he purposed to pass the rest of his life, was, she knew, going to remain also. Father Antony, however, although pressed by the hospitable Admiral to stay, urged the necessity of an early departure for himself, in order that he might take advantage of the summer weather to proceed up country to the far and distant point where he

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proposed to continue his ministrations among the Red Indians.

It was settled therefore that he was to take leave of his rescuer and host at Port au Basque at the southwestern corner of the island. Here the *Renown* was to stay for a few days, and a journey of not more than a day by coasting schooner or steamship would land the priest upon Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia, whence his further progress to the town of Truro would be possible by land. At Truro he would be able to proceed on his journey as far as Montreal by train.

When the flagship had reached Port au Basque the month of June had commenced. Moreover, although the weather during May had been foggy and rainy, June set in fine, the glass being steady.

The worthy Father Antony found a schooner just about to sail for New Sydney, but before his departure he had taken many opportunities of conversation with Geoffrey Digby, telling him of the country to which he was proceeding, giving him particulars of the Indians there, and assuring him of his good offices among them should his preserver—as he hoped—turn his steps in the same direction. As he warmly pressed Geoffrey's hand preparatory to leaving, he thrust into it as a parting gift a thick book written in manuscript which was likely to prove of the greatest utility. This was nothing less than a vocabulary and grammar, written by the Father himself, of the Soto language, which, as Digby already knew, was the tongue spoken with but slight variations by both of those great Indian families, the Ojibboways and Crees.

It had, Father Antony said, taken him years to compile and was the only book of the kind in existence. The language was, he explained, a soft and musical one, and Geoffrey, who already knew a few Indian words, would not find the slightest difficulty in learning the pronunciation, if he only followed the Italian method of pronouncing the vowels, in which the book was arranged upon a simple plan.

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Geoffrey was loth to deprive the Padre of so valuable a result of his labours, but the good man would take no denial.

"I can now get on quite well without it," he said, "having already by its aid translated a great part of the holy Gospels. You, my dear young friend, who have saved my life, may, if you persist in your present intention, find many occasions when a simple sentence from that book may preserve your own. Look here for instance," he continued with a smile. He turned over the pages of his book until he came to one headed by the word "Friend." Under this were a series of sentences, the first one of which he read aloud as follows :—

"'I am a friend, do not shoot me.' There," he continued, "while your Indians are pondering over your first remark you can instantly go on to the next one. 'I am willing to befriend the Indians with the Government and help them to obtain their rights.' Thus they will learn that you sympathise with them, and once your Indian appreciates that fact you are safe with him. Never contradict him if he says he has wrongs. For, as the Red Indian foresees the approach of the iron horse further into his fastnesses and wilds, so is he ever more and more suspicious of the intentions of the Government which has already attempted to impose upon him game laws and forest regulations. One of the two rebellions you have seen yourself already. I only hope and pray that there may not be a third and a bloodier one ere long. But now," Father Antony resumed, with pardonable pride, "I can show you something more that will be useful to you in this book. Under the headings of Gun, for instance—here it is, 'Gun-Bashkissigun,' just glance at that page and the next, you will see the nature of it. Then turn on to 'Trap and Trapping,' you will find a few things there. I don't think I have forgotten much that is likely to be of interest to a hunter."

Father Antony stood by smilingly watching the as-

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tonishment coming over Geoffrey's face as he read such sentences as follows :—

"Do you trap your mink by the creek ? I usually bait my traps with fish. I prefer a log-fall trap for bear. I trap my foxes with frozen fish in winter. I cut a hole in the ground with my axe. I cover the trap with crumbled up bullrush heads. Less beaver are now trapped yearly."

Geoffrey looked up amazed. "Why, Father, you must have been a trapper yourself, or you could never have learned all this in English, much less have turned it into Soto."

"Precisely, my son," laughed the wily priest, "that is exactly what I have been, and not a bad hand either. It was at all events under the garb of a trapper that I first managed to get into touch with the Indians now living to the north of Lake Manitoba, who would have shot me down like a dog had they known that my real mission was to save souls, not to catch lynxes. I traded in skins. It was only long after they had taken pity upon me, for being such a bungler, and had taught me a thing or two, that by degrees I won their confidence. Then, by working with them, from Nature and all her works up to the great Manitou who made nature, I gradually instructed them in Christianity. Should you come to visit me with the band of Crees with whom I am now going to live once more you will find many of them Christians."

"And," inquired Geoffrey, "do you then still dress and live like a hunter or like a clergyman, and do you accompany them on the warpath—since these Indians still wage war with each other sometimes, I know ? Excuse me, Father Antony, but this is all so interesting to me, and your methods are so unusual for a missionary, that I cannot help thirsting for more information."

"Don't mind asking," responded the priest with a smile. "Yes, except on Sundays, I dress like a hunter, and I have even, for the sake of attending to the wounded, accompanied the Indians upon the warpath."

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I had a dreadful time of it though once," he added with a shudder, "when I was present years ago with a large body of Crees at a night attack made upon a band of Sioux somewhere about the American border. In spite of all I could do the Crees would insist upon murdering all the women and children. Oh ! it was dreadful ! dreadful ! The whole band was wiped out completely !"

"The bloodthirsty scoundrels !" exclaimed Geoffrey, indignantly. "I wonder you ever lived with them after that, Father."

"Not at all !" replied Father Antony, cheerfully. "There was, on the contrary, all the more reason for my continuing to reside among them, since I do not think that they would do it now. Moreover, from the point of view of the ethics of an Indian, as they pointed it plainly out to me at the time, I almost think, if there had to be war at all that perhaps they were right to kill off everybody."

"Upon my word, Father, you astonish me. Why, what possible excuse could they give for such cold-blooded barbarity ?"

"Well, when I argued hotly with Kichipinné, or Big Partridge, their leader, he maintained stubbornly that I was wrong, declaring that, even on the grounds of humanity and to prevent future bloodshed, it was better to destroy all of their enemies when they had the chance to do so.

"'For,' he said, 'look here, white man ! suppose I spare the Sioux women, then they breed more children to kill me and my sons. Suppose I let the young dogs live, the boys will become braves to go on the warpath against us, while the girls, like their mothers before them, will bring more braves into the world to fight against the Crees. Now we shall hear nothing more of the Sioux for a long time, whereas if I had spared any of them, perhaps some time they would have come and done the same to us—killed us, men, women and children. It has always been their way—there won't be any left to come now.'

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"As a matter of fact that massacre finished the war. The Sioux were never strong enough to attack the Crees any more until the latter migrated north-east, to get out of the way of their more powerful enemies the Blackfeet, who would not let them hunt the buffalo, which will also soon be wiped out."

"There are a good many buffalo left in Canada yet, Father Antony. It is not two years ago since I killed four in one day myself, and I saw enormous herds then. But I suppose you are right, they too will before long get cleared off the Canadian prairie, as they are fast disappearing on the United States side of the border. It is the spread of the railways in the States that kills off the buffalo. If ever the Canadian Railway is extended across the continent, from Montreal to the Rockies, as they say it will be, every white and red rascalion with a gun on the face of the earth will be after them, butchering them merely for the sake of their tongues, and leaving their bodies to rot. But let us hope that it will be many years before such a calamity as that takes place. Why, what should we hunters do in winter time, supposing that we could no longer procure ourselves buffalo skin coats or buffalo robes for our sleighs? I cannot imagine what everyone in Canada would do!"

"What, indeed?" said the Father; and shortly after that he had to say farewell to Geoffrey and all on board the *Renown*. Half an hour later the white sails of his schooner were seen disappearing in the distance in the direction of Cape Breton Island.

After Father Antony's departure, the French shore business kept the Admiral too busy for a time in one place and another off the coast to go in search of salmon, but for a week or so all the officers of the *Renown* who could be spared from their duties were allowed to visit any rivers which they could get at, they being given the use of the ship's steam launches for the purpose.

But although in this manner the mouths of such well-known rivers as the Codroy, Harry's Brook, Robinson's

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Head Brook and the Barachoix were all visited, the officers came back disappointed as regards salmon fishing. They had caught quantities of splendid trout it is true, the *salmo fontinalis* which, in Newfoundland as in Canada, often visits the sea, returning to the fresh waters coated with a silvery sheen overlying its ordinary brilliant colours and spots of blue, black, red and yellow. Of salmon, however, they had captured but few and small ones, for they reported that the mouths of all the rivers were completely barred with nets, which nets had a mesh so unfairly small, in fact illegally so, that nothing but a small grilse could pass through. Those who returned with captured salmon to the ship exhibited them to the Admiral, who swore forcibly when he saw that every one had its back scored with the mark of these nets.

After a few days off the lower coasts of the island the *Renown* proceeded to the beautiful Bay of Islands. She was anchored there, and one of the most magnificent bits of scenery in the world soon delighted the eyes of all on board, the water running inland between the fine bold headlands of the coast having exactly the appearance of a Norwegian Fjord. But alas! a very short trip up the splendid waters of the Humber displayed to view a scene not so pleasant, in the shape of the obnoxious nets once more completely barring the waterway and so preventing the king of fishes from ascending. For thus it is, even nowadays, years later, in spite of legislation, some of the islanders will go on killing the goose that lays the golden eggs by preventing the salmon from ascending the rivers to perform the natural laws of reproduction upon the gravelly beds of their upper waters.

Sir Arthur, in despair, turned to Geoffrey who, while recruiting his health, had not yet left the ship.

"Confound it all, Digby, don't you at all events know of any place in this infernal island which is not infested by these arrant fish poachers? Cannot you lend us a hand, my lad? Can't you put us on to a spot where a few of us can go into camp and have a good time without there being any abominable nets? I should like to

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take Lady McGeorge and Montgomery and you, of course. I think that would be enough of us not to over fish the pools, and we will take one or two of the blue-jackets as our gillies."

"No, not enough of us," here interposed Lady McGeorge, laughing, "for I want Mr Conway to come as my gillie, if you please, Admiral. Will you let him come? He has promised to be a very good boy indeed, and says he knows how to use a landing-net well to land my trout for me, and I intend to catch plenty."

"Most assuredly we will take the lad if you like, Lady McGeorge, that is if Captain Ponsonby will kindly spare him to us from his duties, and we will make him your gillie if Digby will only tell us where to go," responded Sir Arthur. "Come, Digby, where shall it be? No nets, and lots of fish for all, is what will suit us."

Geoffrey replied without hesitation that he knew of the very place to go to for a week, and that he would promise everyone a good time if only the weather was fair and they were not eaten to death by the numerous stinging and biting flies for which Newfoundland is famous, or infamous.

"There are, Sir Arthur," he said, "no inhabitants settled as yet near the mouth of the Gambo River. Also, although there are some big stones in the bed of that stream, we can ascend it in boats, especially at this time of year when there is plenty of water. Then, a mile or two up, we reach the first of the great ponds through which the river passes, for they call all the rivers brooks, and all the lakes ponds here, as you know. Now you see my point? As there are no inhabitants there will be no netting, and I have fished these waters before with success. Well, after reaching the narrows, at the head of the first pond, we have to traverse another lake or pond of the same size. In the narrows connecting the two I have caught some good salmon, and in the upper pond I have caught all sorts of things at certain spots I know."

"What do you mean by all sorts of things?" in-

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interrupted the Admiral, who was getting excited as his hopes rose. "Well, there are salmon and any number of huge sea-trout ; there also are the wrongly so-called land-locked salmon, which, however, are not land-locked at all as they have a clear run to the sea. The fish really is a sort of fresh-water salmon trout, like those they have in Canada, in the Province of Quebec, in Maine and elsewhere."

"I know," cut in Sir Arthur. "They call them ouananiche on the Saguenay, and swear that they are really the same as the salmon, or were so once upon a time, which I don't agree with. They are nevertheless fine sporting fish that jump out of the water all the time when hooked, but they can't compare with salmon in size or running powers."

"Well, the Newfoundland land-locked salmon do nothing much but jump either, Sir Arthur, but they jump so high and so often that they often jump off the fly and sometimes actually jump into the boat."

"Oh, what fun ! I must catch some of those fish, Sir Arthur. I hope that you will make up your mind to take us all to this Gander River, and I only hope that when I hook these jumping monsters they won't make a goose of me and jump off again."

"Gambo not Gander, if you please, Lady McGeorge," interposed Geoffrey, laughing ; "but since you are to have Mr Conway for your gillie it will be his duty to take care of your interests in that matter. All that I can do is to take you, if the Admiral likes, to the place where you can pit your prowess against that of the fish. And I warn you that you will have to look out for broken lines with the huge trout far more than with those leaping terrors, for there are literally monsters in the lakes, and plenty of them, and they rise freely too."

"What about the salmon ? How do they rise ?" asked Sir Arthur, anxiously.

"Like salmon everywhere else, very well indeed upon some days and very badly indeed upon others, but more often than not very well."

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"Then that settles the matter! We will make all arrangements for the Gambo Brook and Ponds, and the sooner we begin making them the better."

"Here, Mr Conway," he called, "I want Mr Montgomery at once." The rosy-faced lad had been standing within earshot during this conversation, gradually drawing nearer and nearer, open-mouthed with excitement as he learned that he was to be invited to the Admiral's fishing-party.

His tormentor, the Hon. Claude Rapp, the flag-lieutenant was also standing not far away. And, if the truth must be known, it was almost as much to annoy him as to please Hugh Conway that Geraldine McGeorge had asked for the lad to be invited, for she had taken a dislike to the Hon. Mr Rapp, who was a bit of a fop and a coxcomb, whom she found it necessary to keep under. Moreover, she had heard him most unjustly pitching into young Conway on the previous evening, and had a very good idea of the reason. So she thought that if the boy could have a little pleasure through any action of hers, in return for the severe reprimand she had heard him receive, she felt sure, on account of her, then she would endeavour to procure that pleasure for him.

Thus was the expedition organised, tents and everything to make everyone comfortable being arranged for from the ship. One thing especially was not forgotten. By Geoffrey's recommendation a concoction consisting chiefly of tar and vaseline was taken for the smearing of faces and hands to keep off the mosquitoes and black flies. For the naval officers who had already been on fishing expeditions had all returned marked as if they had an attack of smallpox.

CHAPTER VIII

SOME BOTANY AND A BEAR FIGHT

IN Newfoundland, perhaps more than any other country in the world, the comfort of a camping-out party is made or marred by the weather. For while there is often a misty rain, sometimes warm and muggy, sometimes accompanied by cold biting winds, there is also the pest of insects to be warred against. And, rain or shine of one kind or another, the flies are always with you. Their tortures can be borne in fine weather, when it is possible to stay in the open air most of the time, but when the persistent rain makes confinement to the tent obligatory life becomes a burden shut up with myriads of mosquitoes and sand flies, which will get inside and stop in despite of all one's efforts.

In addition to the above-mentioned pests there are several other winged creatures which bite freely in the daytime. First there is the ubiquitous black fly, the little creature so well known in Canada whose poisonous bite not only draws blood but leaves a little sore which itches violently for days, constantly forming a new head which suppurates when rubbed off. Another pest is a brown creature called the caribou or deer fly, which looks like an ordinary gadfly or small bee, and is said to be bred from larvæ which feed in the nostrils and palates of the caribou or reindeer with which Newfoundland abounds. Lastly comes a much more ferocious-looking insect, thicker than, and about the size of, a hornet, which it resembles in being barred with black and yellow. This formidable insect the Newfoundlanders call the stout. Fortunately, although both the caribou fly and the stout

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bite hard and suddenly and draw blood in the operation, neither has a sting. Moreover, the irritation caused by their bite soon disappears, instead of remaining to torment one with fiery burning like that of the mosquito, black fly, and sand flies. These last tiny pests appear solely in the evening, and bite, if possible, worse than all the rest put together. Even when mosquito curtains are available, in camping out, whether in Newfoundland or Canada, it is always desirable in summer to avoid pitching the tents actually in the forests, to select, if possible, some point devoid of trees. The beach of a lake, a sand bank, or a point running out into the water which is well swept by the breeze is best. For wind in a great measure keeps all these brutes away.

Fortunately for the comfort of the party proceeding up the Gambo River, Geoffrey knew that he could find some such advantageous spots for camping; moreover, the weather being sunshiny, with good breezes, the party of anglers who were chiefly to fish from boats were not likely, upon the open waters of the wind-swept lakes, to suffer so severely as the naval officers who had recently visited the rivers running through the forests. There, the rank insect-breeding vegetation had been everywhere close around them as they had plied their willing rods. Everything that could be arranged for the comfort of Lady McGeorge, and indeed of all, had been thought of by the Admiral.

With a view to this expedition he had, while at St John's, laid in many yards of mosquito netting, and even of finer netting. He had bought up, in fact, all the coarse muslin that he could find in the city. For, old campaigner as he was, the Admiral, to use his own expression, intended "to get to windward of" even the sand flies. Fighting Sir Arthur had been camping out many a time before and age had brought experience. He had got two good tents already, and the bluejackets were to rig up more out of sailcloth. Enough netting was taken not only to form a screen to the doorway of each tent, to make curtains to surround the couches of

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all, formed of blankets spread upon the fragrant scented spruce boughs, but also to form, when elevated on poles and laths, a large roomy apartment to be entered by a passage with two doorways. It would be possible, under cover of this cunningly-devised rampart, to take the alfresco meals in safety, while smiling contentedly at the thwarted flies buzzing savagely outside in the sunshine by day or humming disappointedly in the light of the camp-fire at night.

It was found quite practicable, owing to the high state of the river, to ascend its lower portion, and also to traverse the whole of the lower lake with the smallest of the ship's steam launches, although considerable care was necessary in the river to avoid either the launch or the boats, which she towed astern, from coming into contact with rocks here and there. The ascent, therefore, was made very slowly until the first pond was entered, where the water was deep for the nine miles of its length. Nevertheless a good lookout was kept forward for rocks, and the lead heaved occasionally for soundings to be taken.

Upon landing for luncheon upon the shores of this picturesque lake, on whose waters no steam pinnace had ever floated before, marks were seen upon the sandy beach, which speedily told a tale to the experienced eye of Geoffrey Digby, not however so apparent to the eyes of the others.

"Look here, Sir Arthur," exclaimed Lady McGeorge, gaily, almost as soon as she stepped ashore, "Mr Digby has been fibbing in telling us that this country is uninhabited, for there must be a farm round here somewhere, where we shall be able to obtain fresh milk for our tea. See, here are the footprints of cows in the sand ; there is no mistaking them."

Sir Arthur was puzzled, he looked at the footprints, then at Geoffrey, inquiringly. The latter laughed.

"Cows that are scarcely tame enough to milk, I fear, Lady McGeorge, although their near relatives the reindeer are certainly domesticated. These are the footprints

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of a bull and cow caribou which may be now reclining not half a mile away from us in that thick spruce wood yonder. For the caribou hide in the forests in the summer, to escape the flies, and haunt the barren lands in the autumn and winter in great numbers."

"Oh, how interesting this is! But see, Mr Conway is making excited signs over yonder, he too has found something. What is it, I wonder?"

"A panther has been here, I think!" exclaimed the midshipman, excitedly, as he pointed out some footprints. "Do come here, Mr Digby, and tell us what it is. If this isn't the track of a panther I'll be jiggered."

"Those are the marks of a lynx!" exclaimed Geoffrey. "There are probably lots of them about here. Vicious beasts that belong to the cat tribe. This must have been a very big one. Look here, he has been eating a dead salmon; here are its head and tail, and it must have been a big fish too."

"By Jove!" said the Admiral, admiringly, as he looked at the remains, "I wish I had been the lynx to get that fish. I wonder how on earth he got him out of the water."

As the bluejackets were putting up rough tables, getting wood together, starting a fire, and generally getting things ready for lunch, the party, wandering about in all directions, had an opportunity of observing the vegetation upon the land adjacent to the sandy beach, which was quite new and interesting. With pleasure Geoffrey answered any questions put to him about the plants overspreading the marsh-like land, which, that sunny June day, was radiant with bright flowers, and looked like some rough wild garden, its varied hues were so many.

However, with the exception of Geraldine, none of the party took any interest in botany.

The Admiral, inspired with enthusiasm by the sight of the dead fish, went to the boat, and with a bluejacket's assistance began undoing a bundle of fishing-rods. Young Conway, with an enormous revolver of service

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pattern in his hand, strolled off to a clump of bushes and began drawing it for a possible lynx, while Harry Montgomery, rifle in hand, wandered away with Muirhead, the coxswain of the launch, saying something about caribou calf making doubtless very good veal, if one could only get one in the spruce trees over there.

Thus Geraldine found herself alone with Geoffrey. She asked him to walk with her a little way across the marsh and tell her something about the mosses and flowers. She had good boots on, she said, so was not afraid of getting wet, but that seemed hardly necessary if one picked one's way.

As they tramped along, she soon found herself sinking ankle deep in a lichen-like moss to which Geoffrey called her attention.

"Look at this," he said. "This in itself is sufficient to account for the presence of the caribou; it is the Iceland moss upon which they feed. Then, too, do you see those lovely flowers? They are orchids."

"Oh! do help me to gather a bunch of them," she replied. "How delicate and beautiful they are. And what is this plant, with the green leaves like box leaves and a white flower, which grows so luxuriantly?"

"That, Lady McGeorge, is the Labrador tea plant, of which the leaves make an excellent beverage very like real tea."

"Oh, capital! I am going to gather some, and I will prepare some tea for Sir Arthur, and see if he knows the difference, so will you please go on getting me the orchids. I see another kind over there."

Presently Geraldine called out to Geoffrey. "See," she said, "what a large bunch of tea plants I have got, and lots of it has a pink flower instead of a white one. Now, Mr Digby, am not I a good girl? I shall be able to make tea for all of you, not only for the Admiral, you see."

"And poison us all, thank you kindly," replied Geoffrey, with a smile, as he rose from his flower picking.

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"Poison you ! what do you mean ? Didn't you tell me—"

"Certainly not that this pretty pink-flowered plant was Labrador tea, although it so much resembles it. No, indeed, Lady McGeorge, that plant is called lambskill, and is deadly—at all events to sheep. I never knew of its being tried as yet on man."

"Oh ! dear, dear !" wailed the young woman, "I am afraid I shall never make a botanist, and it looks so innocent too !" She held her bunch out comically at arm's length. "Please teach me some more about these plants and forgive me for being a goose."

"Well, here is an innocent and dainty little plant if you like, the most delicately fragrant flower too in the northern hemisphere. Just look at its twin bells and scent its sweet perfume."

"Oh, how delicious !" said Geraldine. "May I keep it ? And what is it called ? I don't see any more."

"Of course you may keep it if you like. The dainty little plant is named *Linnæus borealis*, after the Swedish philosopher and botanist whose favourite it was. It is not very common here."

"Well, now it is my favourite also, so I shall put it away in my purse and press it. Can you give me a piece of paper to put it in ?"

Taking out a pocket-book from his breast pocket, Geoffrey tore out a leaf, and carefully folding up the flower with its twin bells therein, was handing it back when Lady McGeorge made a further request.

"Do you know," she said, in rather a diffident manner, "that I have not a scrap of your handwriting ? Indeed, I have never even seen it ! Well, since I have now become your mother confessor, I don't think that is quite right, you know, so will you do a little thing to please me ?" She reddened slightly, looked down, then looked up again at him appealingly.

"I will do anything to please you," said Geoffrey, looking her pleasantly in the eyes with a kindly smile.

"Well, I see you have a pencil, so will you just write

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upon that paper the name of this plant. Then put Geraldine McGeorge from Geoffrey Digby, Newfoundland, June 17th, 18—.”

“Why, that is quite a letter, Lady McGeorge. And what on earth will you do with it?” Geoffrey paused, pencil in hand—hesitatingly.

“I shall keep it when there are no letters—to remind me of the kind-hearted man who saved my life. May I not do that? You said you would do anything to please me just now.”

“Oh! certainly, if you like. Will you hold my pocket-book while I write on it for you?”

When this little operation was completed, Geraldine took the paper and the flower almost in reverence and put them away in her purse.

Her eyes looked her thanks, and if they looked or said anything more Geoffrey did not see what they said.

Turning in silence they commenced to retrace their steps, and in avoiding a shallow pool of water advanced unconsciously in the direction of the clump of willow bushes which young Conway had selected for his lynx-hunting operations.

Near the edge of this pool Geoffrey paused, and picking up a vine leaf shaped plant and flower which grew on its brink, held it out to his companion.

“You have been in Norway, I believe. Now I will see if you are a botanist or not. What is that? Do you remember?”

Geraldine gave a little cry of delight. “Of course I do—Molterr! the delicious yellow molterr berry of which I have eaten basins full in August. Fancy its being here. What do they call it?”

“Here they call it the bake apple, and they prize it highly as it is hard to find. But what is that?” He turned quickly as a shot was heard in the distance, in the spruce trees. Directly after there was another shot, then a sound of shouting.

A second later there emerged into the open, running at some distance across their front, the form of an

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enormous black bear. It shambled along, not at a very rapid pace, when presently there emerged after it the figure of a bluejacket. The foolish fellow was brandish-an axe, and while running after the bear shouting, in selected terms of the choicest "sailorman" language, to the brute to stop and let him catch him! But, over the deep moss, the bear gained considerably upon the foolhardy bluejacket.

"Oh, Heavens!" cried Geraldine, as she gripped her companion's arm, "let us run for our lives, the brute is coming this way!"

It was true. At that moment the enormous creature, which looked as large as a big calf, turned in their direction.

Glancing round, Geoffrey saw in a second that to attempt to run would be fatal. The willow bushes would afford no protection even if they could reach them; moreover, to run would only make the animal pursue them—to face it might frighten it away.

"Don't run! Down on the ground!—flat—there behind me. Don't move for your life!" and he forced Lady McGeorge flat down into some low scrub of bog myrtle which grew knee-high; in this she was completely concealed.

It was now Geoffrey's turn to advance—shouting. He faced the bear but did not turn it. It moderated its pace, however, but, loudly growling and showing its teeth, came on determinedly towards him.

When the huge brute was but twenty yards from him Geoffrey shouted louder than ever, and seizing his cap dashed it at the bear, then he stood still with his arms folded, regarding it boldly.

The bear stopped, seized the cap in its huge jaws with a roar of rage, shaking it viciously and growling horribly. Then it rushed forward ten yards—fifteen yards. At only five yards from Digby it raised itself on its hind legs and stood with its huge paws extended. It was about to hurl itself upon the form of the man who stood motionless, when the sailor with the axe, still ad-

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vancing yelling nautical oaths, made the creature turn its head.

Even in that moment of deadly peril Digby could hardly help a smile as he recognised the kindly features of Muirhead the coxswain of the launch. What would he not have given himself for that axe ! He had nothing but a penknife ! That would be useless, but he would risk anything to save Lady McGeorge. In a second it flashed across his brain that he had once met a half-breed named Wilson, who had held a bear's jaws with his hands, wrestled with it and escaped alive in the end. Even as the bear turned its head, Geoffrey it was who sprang upon the bear. Yelling to the panting sailor, "Come quick ! strike at his neck !" Geoffrey Digby seized the jaws of the bear which were closed as they still held the cap. He held them together with his powerful right hand, grasping its throat with the other. The brute threw its claw-tipped paws around the man's body, in an endeavour to crush him ; but Geoffrey was strong and sinewy and threw his weight all forward, thrusting well into the breast of the bear. It lost its balance and fell backwards. In its efforts to rise it lost its grip of Geoffrey and beat the air for a moment.

At that moment, while man and bear were so mixed up together that the sailor could never have struck a blow, Geraldine McGeorge, who had been absolutely impelled to rise to her feet, screamed for help, and unexpected help arrived.

With an eldritch yell of "Hold on to him, Mr Digby, I'm coming !" the form of a rosy-cheeked boy was seen dashing out of the willows.

A second later, running up to the side of the struggling pair, Midshipman Conway seized the huge bear by the ear, placed the muzzle of his pistol inside it, and fired.

The animal rolled back struggling horribly, apparently in its dying throes, but not dead. Geoffrey Digby instantly tore himself clear ; he was unharmed save for a few claw scratches and a coat torn to ribbons.

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Again the brave boy fired his pistol, this time discharging it into the chest of the monster.

To the surprise and horror of Geraldine, instead of killing the animal, this second shot seemed only to revive it and to increase its rage. It suddenly regained its feet, and turning savagely was just about to spring upon the boy when Muirhead arrived with his axe.

With a slogan of triumph he whirled the axe high above his head. With a flash the blade descended—a flash and a crash! Surely the ancestor of the striker must have been an executioner at the Court of the Scottish Kings!

For lo! and behold! the bluejacket had completely beheaded the bear! With the blood spurting out from the severed trunk the body stood for a second—then fell.

Before that blow descended Geraldine McGeorge had rushed forward and seized the brave boy in her arms. She had torn him aside so that if the bear had charged home it would have been upon herself that its attack would have fallen, not upon the midshipman.

CHAPTER IX

THE ADMIRAL ASTRAY

THE jets of blood spurting from the bear's neck had covered Lady McGeorge and young Hugh Conway with their gore, especially Geraldine, who had partly shielded the boy when holding him behind her by sheer force, wrought up in her excitement. However she never noticed that circumstance, but when she saw that the bear was dead rushed to Geoffrey, who was calmly picking his mutilated cap from the ground and examining it critically. A long claw mark upon his face and scalp made his bleeding features look rather ghastly as Geraldine seized him impulsively with both hands. She held them firmly.

"Heavens ! how brave you are !" she exclaimed, "and this dear boy too. Bless you, my brave lad ; your splendid pluck saved Mr Digby's life at that critical moment. If ever you lack a mother or a sister's love come to Geraldine McGeorge."

She threw her arms around the slim rosy-cheeked boy and kissed him. His revolver still in his hand and eyes sparkling with delight as the panting Geoffrey also now extended his hand to him in an eloquent silence, the plucky lad expostulated,—

"Oh ! thanks awfully, Lady McGeorge, but I did nothing, I enjoyed shooting the bear awfully ; besides, it was Muirhead there killed him, you know."

"Yes, and I thank him for it too with all my heart. Mr Muirhead, give me your hand. I thank you for saving us all. It was a magnificent stroke ! You are a fine fellow."

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The coxswain of the launch, who had just picked up the huge bear's head, shifted it from one hand to the other, then rubbed his gory hand on his trousers ere he timidly extended it, saying, "It ain't for the likes of me to be shakin' hands with the likes of you, my lady, but as, by the way you tore that there young gentleman behind you to save him from the bear, I knows you ain't afraid of nothing livin', I makes my excuses for taking such a liberty, and there's my hand, my lady."

"Nonsense! No liberty indeed!" exclaimed Geraldine, and she wrung the huge blood-stained hand of the blue-jacket. "But explain," she questioned. "What were you doing? Why were you running after the bear with only an axe like that? It was a crazy action that nearly cost Mr Digby and myself our lives, you know."

"Yes, Muirhead! What on earth were you doing there?" said Digby, speaking for the first time since he had told Lady McGeorge to lie flat on the ground. "Were you mad to run after the bear like that?"

"Only obeying orders, sir," replied the sailor. "You see, sir, Mr Montgomery he says to me, after he shot the other bear, he says, 'That bear's hit too, run, Muirhead, an' see where it stops. Don't let the varmint out of your sight.' And so I was running, sir, especially as I wanted to get a clip at him myself. For a bear ate up my little sister, sir, and nearly ate me too, when we was children together, where we was born in Canada, sir. That's how it was, sir. I thought the beast was wounded and intended a-finishin' him off for sure."

"What, has my brother shot a bear too?" exclaimed Geraldine. "Was he in danger also?"

"Yes, my lady, and a beauty she is too, but not so big as this one. We came on the two together, sudden-like, when we was a-lookin' for deers. Then she came first, bouncin' right on us, and Mr Montgomery shot her dead; then this one he jumped out after her, makin' at us roarin', but bolted when he was shot at. So I gave chase astarn full steam ahead."

"With the result we know. Well, now, Lady

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McGeorge," said Geoffrey, "don't you think we should be getting back to the beach. The Admiral will be anxious with all this shooting and shouting going on, and your dress will sadly require washing, at which we shall have to help you. Moreover, you must be tired after this excitement and want your luncheon."

She looked at him reproachfully. "And you, are you not tired after your terrible wrestle, that you should be, as usual, only thoughtful for others? But you are right, the Admiral must be anxious. Let us return to him. I wonder indeed that the shots have not brought him to join us already."

"Oh! he was fishing," said Hugh Conway. "I saw his line going swish, swish, like anything, when I was lynx-hunting on the other side of the willows. Perhaps he has hooked something big and not been able to come away."

"In that case we had certainly better go and help him; but I think," said Geoffrey, "that I will bathe my face a minute first in this pool and make myself presentable. You, Conway, had better go on with Muirhead as quick as you can and tell him it is all right."

"Very well, Mr Digby. Come on, Muirhead, bring the old bear's nut along with you. We'd better run, and perhaps we'll be in time to see some more fun. I think this Newfoundland's just a jolly place for larks."

And off rushed the boy as lively as if nobody had been in any danger, Muirhead, carrying the "old bear's nut," making good time after him, although rather hampered by his sanguinary burden. But when they got to the beach they could see neither the Admiral nor anyone else. Moreover, one of the boats was missing, although its oars were lying on the shore. They ran down the beach some way to see if Sir Arthur had perchance had it towed round a slight point jutting out a little way off, thinking it possible that he might have anchored there and sent the other boat back.

Meanwhile, as Geraldine with her own dainty pocket-handkerchief insisted upon striving to staunch the blood

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from the nasty scratch on Geoffrey's face, she said to him quietly but determinedly, "Geoffrey Digby, I really cannot allow you to call me Lady McGeorge any longer."

"Well, what then, Lady McGeorge, am I to call you, since that is your own name? Oh, thanks, you really have bathed my face long enough. Let me wash the blood off your dress."

"What indeed? Do not you see that you cannot go on for ever saving my life and yet treating me with such absurd formality. You must call me Geraldine."

"And do you think your husband would like it if he were to hear me addressing you by your Christian name?"

"My husband! my husband!" she answered impatiently. "I hardly know if I have a husband. I certainly was married to my father's old friend a few years ago, just to please them both—certainly not to please myself; but the old General always tells me that I am to look upon him as a second father, nothing else. Most assuredly he would not mind in the least; he never minds what I do for that matter."

"Do you mean to tell me that Sir Peter would not object to my calling you Geraldine in his presence? Unless you can tell me that I should prefer not to do it."

"Oh! you do not know my husband. I, at all events, am going to call you Geoffrey now, even as I shall do when I present you to him as the man to whom he owes the life of his wife, preserved to him by that man twice over. I know that when I tell him that I wished you to waive formality and that you would not do it he will think it very ridiculous. Of this I can assure you, for he always agrees with me in everything. You will see I speak the truth."

Geoffrey smiled. "Oh, very well, that settles this weighty matter. I do not want to seem ridiculous in your husband's eyes nor in yours, so I will call you

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what you like for the remainder of the short time I shall still see you—Geraldine.”

“Thank you, Geoffrey, that is kind of you, and I am really grateful to you for thus giving way to my wishes. Harry, who already feels to you as if you were a brother, will be delighted, for he told me only yesterday he wished that we were members of one family.”

“All right then, that settles it. If there are no secrets or mysteries between any of us I do not mind. Now, Geraldine, let us go back to Sir Arthur ; but before we do so let me tell you one thing, it is that your pluck in protecting that boy, who is a little brick, has sent you ever so far up in my estimation. When I look at that huge carcase lying there and remember that you, a frail woman, deliberately interposed your body between that lad and the bear, I realise that you are a brave woman—I can say no more.”

“Had I only been afforded an opportunity of saving you, as twice now you have preserved me,” returned Geraldine, “then I should have had some satisfaction.”

“Had we not better be getting back to the Admiral ?” remarked Geoffrey, adding a moment later, “Geraldine McGeorge, you have shown that you are capable of noble deeds and I shall not forget it.”

They returned to the shore of the lake without another word on either side—both were doubtless thinking of the danger just escaped.

As they reached it, they saw Hugh Conway, Harry Montgomery and Muirhead with another bluejacket, Bill Jenkins, just getting a boat launched.

Harry rushed to his sister, kissed her warmly and as warmly grasped Geoffrey’s hand. “Thank God you are safe, Gerry ; but what an awful mess you are in. Digby, I have heard of your magnificent pluck. God bless you for it. But we have no time to talk now. The Admiral has disappeared completely, gone in a boat without oars. Jenkins just now was holding the stern of the dinghy, while Sir Arthur was fishing from the other end of it. He had already caught a big sea trout

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when he heard my first shot. He sent Jenkins off at once, telling him to come and see what I had shot. The cook and other men ran off with Jenkins and now are skinning my bear and cutting meat off it. That was half an hour ago. When I came back here with Jenkins I found Conway and Muirhead coming back up the beach. They reported the Admiral missing, and there is, you see, now a heavy breeze blowing off shore. I am horribly anxious. Can the boat have foundered? She is not anywhere visible. We must pull up the lake and search."

"Stop a minute, Montgomery," said Geoffrey, "perhaps I can help you; I will come with you."

"No, you stop here with Gerry, there's a good fellow. This place seems full of wild beasts. Besides we four are enough."

"Well, then, I have an idea where the Admiral may be. Look across the lake; the other shore does not look half a mile away over there, but it is much more. What you see just opposite to us is the long island covered with trees. This end curves back so that the trees upon it blend with the fir trees on a point of the shore behind, while it is in reality separated from them by a wide channel. I have been down behind the island and know. Now if the boat got adrift the wind might easily have carried the dinghy behind that island; that is far more probable than that the dinghy has foundered. You will probably find the Admiral round there peacefully fishing away and waiting to be discovered."

"Oh! thanks, thanks. I hope to Heaven it may be so. Good-bye now."

"Jump in, lads. Give way there."

They were off, three of them pulling while Hugh Conway steered.

Geoffrey meanwhile got hold of one of the little tents which had with other things been taken out of the dinghy, and pitched it round behind the point of trees. He, moreover, from his own hunting kit, which had also been lifted ashore from the boat when the Admiral

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entered it, soon fished out a camp washing-basin, soap, towels, a waterproof sheet, a rug, all sorts of things. Then, taking Geraldine to this tent, he told her to make herself tidy and comfortable within, but to give him out her cloth jacket and skirt which he would wash for her thoroughly and dry in the sun. He promised, moreover, to remain within easy call on the other side of the trees, so that she might not be nervous.

As Lady McGeorge gratefully accepted all these little comforts and attentions and ensconced herself within the little tent, she murmured to herself with a sigh of satisfaction,—

“How could anyone ever be nervous with a man like Geoffrey Digby anywhere in the neighbourhood? How considerate he is, how neat and handy too—nothing for my comfort is forgotten, and yet half an hour or so ago that man was struggling for his life with a bear.”

She looked round the little tent—nothing indeed was forgotten. Upon the ground was the waterproof sheet, while upon it, folded up for her to sit upon, was the rug. An india-rubber camp bath was filled with clean water from the lake, with a cake of Pears' soap alongside it, while an india-rubber bucket with more water stood handy. The mosquito curtains were rigged up across the doorway on the side facing the lake, while, so that Geraldine might have something to wear when denuded of her dress, Geoffrey had even had the forethought to place handy for her his own waterproof coat.

Soon she was revelling in the delicious water, enjoying the while the satisfaction of the feeling of being protected, of realising that Geoffrey was within sound of her voice, would fly to her in a moment if she needed him.

Thus in a state of blessed beautitude Geraldine enjoyed her tub, delighting, like the celebrated Diana de Poitiers before her, in the caressing embrace of the cool liquid. When almost dressed, suddenly she heard a little rustling in the grass and fallen pine needles behind the blanket. Now so entirely unforeseen and sudden had been the two

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great dangers that had already overtaken her that Geraldine's nerves, so recently lulled to repose, were instantly on the alert for some fresh calamity—she feared snakes. Again a rustle, and then something small scuttled across the floor of her tent.

A piercing scream brought Geoffrey rushing to the door merely to see escaping from the entrance a little tiny squirrel known as a chipmunk, scarcely larger indeed than a good-sized mouse. His cheery laughter without soon restored the equanimity of, although it covered with confusion, Lady McGeorge within. Nevertheless she was delighted to hear his merriment. For the reassuring tones of the peals, which proclaimed that there was no danger, were those of the first laughter that she had ever heard proceeding from the reserved Geoffrey.

As, realising how nearly akin the sublime is to the ridiculous, Geraldine hurriedly continued her toilet after this, Geoffrey called out good-humouredly that he thought that he had better go off guard for a minute to see if he could not find a bluejacket with an axe to decapitate the monster. Five minutes later, however, he returned, calling out as he approached that he had brought her something really useful. Her toilet was sufficiently advanced for her to be able to push her shapely head out of the tent, although her luxuriant black tresses were all in the wildest disorder.

"I only pray to Heaven that it may be a looking-glass and not a chopper," she cried, laughing, her brightly-coloured cheeks slightly blushing as she remembered the chipmunk.

Geoffrey brought his hand from behind his back where he had concealed something, or rather some things. He actually had brought a pocket looking-glass, and, what was more, a bottle of "Mahal," his own particular hair tonic, these luxuries being accompanied by a new tortoise-shell comb in a case.

"Pears' soap and 'Mahal'! Why that is what I always use myself! Geoffrey Digby!" exclaimed Lady McGeorge, jestingly, "you never forget anything, no

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matter what, from a lifebuoy to a looking-glass ! I declare that you deserve to make every woman adore you."

"That's nice," he replied, "but I have news for you. They've found the Admiral. I can see the two boats now, but there's something going on that I cannot understand. If you want to see, you had better hurry up."

CHAPTER X

A TERRIBLE MONSTER

WHEN that gallant sailor fighting Sir Arthur once started fishing it required little less than an earthquake or an eruption of Mont Pelée to stop him, if the fish were rising. Therefore, when he had heard Harry Montgomery's first shot fired he had barely turned his head to tell the bluejacket to run off and see if the young gentleman had killed a caribou.

Then he had continued casting his flies. Just as the second shot was fired he hooked a land-locked salmon, whose jumpings and tuggings interested him far more than the second report of the rifle. It was an obstinate fish—thus, although the Admiral was perfectly well aware of the fact that the boat had gone adrift, he did not care in the least, he intended to kill his fish, the other boat would come for him, in time. Now it so happened that, although he had a long reel line on a salmon reel attached to the rod, the rod itself was only a light grilse rod. It therefore took him some little time to tire out the fish, and even then, owing to the length of the rod, the Admiral found it very difficult, in the little lumpy sea which was rising on the lake, to get the fish near enough to the side of the boat to reach it with his landing-net.

One moment he would see its brown back in the crest of a wave, then there would be a swirl and only the broad tail of the ouananiche would appear for a second, as it dived again into a hollow of the sea. And still the boat went on drifting.

When at length, by dint of shortening up his line to

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merely the length of his rod, Sir Arthur did contrive to get within reach of his fish, he found it so large that he could not conveniently get it into the net. However luck eventually favoured him; the fish being momentarily quiescent, he managed deftly to swoop it into the boat, although once there, it returned to a more lively condition than ever, bouncing up and down upon the bottom boards like an india-rubber ball, in a way that terrified its captor lest it should get overboard again. By the time that it had been successfully collared, unhooked and knocked upon the head, the Admiral, who was a large and rather corpulent man, was quite out of breath. As he sat down to rest and survey with feelings of pride the now lifeless corpse of his victim, realising with joy that it must weigh seven pounds at least, he perceived that he had got a very long way from the shore near which the steam launch was anchored. He had never heard the shouting of Muirhead, the screams of Lady McGeorge, nor the pistol shots of Midshipman Conway, so was alarmed at nothing, although he perceived that he had no oars in the boat. Nor did the fact that the other boat was not yet coming to his assistance alarm him in the least, he determined to go on fishing. Having filled and lighted a pipe, the Admiral examined his flies and found that the tail fly, with which he had just killed his fish, was worn considerably. It was a sea trout fly like his dropper, but he now determined to change it. Although Digby had told him that it would be almost useless to fish for salmon until they arrived at the narrows connecting the two lakes, his success had made Sir Arthur ambitious. As the little boat bumped up and down, therefore, he took out his fly book, and after examining in succession all the contents, eventually decided upon a large "Silver Doctor" with a double hook. This he affixed to the end of his cast, a new and strong salmon cast, which, knowing that the Newfoundland trout are not particular about fine tackle, he had put on to start with, just in case of emergencies. Nevertheless, the old angler

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carefully tested, with a very heavy strain, each knot of the gut in succession ere he recommenced casting. One of the knots broke ; this he tied up afresh, cutting off the former ends near where they had parted. All this took time, so that, when Sir Arthur was ready to again commence operations he found himself well over the lake. Moreover, he noticed that his dinghy had drifted perilously near some little breakers dashing on the rocks on the point of the island which Geoffrey had pointed out to Montgomery. The direction of the wind, however, was such that the Admiral's momentary anxiety was quickly allayed, for he saw that his boat would clear the point and drift into the smoother water of the channel beyond. He commenced throwing the fly as he passed the point, and just at he had reached its lee side, he noticed a foaming, swirling eddy in a little bay, formed by wind and current combined, sweeping round a straight rock projecting at right angles to the shore of the island. Almost as soon as he saw this eddy, he saw something else which made his war-worn heart leap. It was the head and tail rise of a very big salmon right in the foam. Being within easy distance, and the boat now not drifting quickly, the Admiral had time to make five or six casts over different parts of this eddy before passing out of reach. But in each case the "Silver Doctor" fell in vain on the water, in vain was worked back in short alluring jerks towards the boat. Once indeed a big trout rose at the fly, but the fisherman saw it in time to snatch his line away without the fish getting hooked and so spoiling his chance of the salmon.

At length the boat was past—well past the eddy. A last long cast, although it reached the eddy, brought no rise. The disappointed Admiral having realised that, alas ! that big salmon was not to be for him stopped working his fly and commenced disconsolately reeling in his line, the fly trailing along the top of the water. Suddenly, when the line was nearly all in, there was a tremendous splash and the rod was nearly torn out of

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the fisherman's hands, as an enormous salmon seized the "Silver Doctor" within a few feet of the boat. It had followed the fly right away from the eddy and then come at it like a tiger. An instant later there was the flash of silver in the air, and, whirling over high above the boat, Sir Arthur saw the huge form of the tremendous fish which, as it came down again upon the water with a resounding smack, splashed him with the spray from head to foot. Well was it for the gallant Admiral that he had tested every knot, broken the line at the only place that it was not fit to stand the terrific strain of that first drag, of that spring into the air. For a second after the leap the angler thought the fish must be gone, as all was quiet. But if the salmon hesitated, it was only to decide the route he should take.

Fortunately for the Admiral this was down wind, not back in its teeth. Now he was off, down that channel like a racehorse, the reel screaming and the bending grilse rod dragged right down, so that its point was but an inch or two above the water as the line fizzed out. When about ninety yards of line were out the salmon leaped again. "A forty pounder at least, by Heaven!" ejaculated the Admiral, for even at that distance the salmon looked big. "And he will have all my line out and break me in another ten seconds, I can't stop him. Oh! for my boat's crew, to row me in pursuit!" But there was no boat's crew—nothing but a solitary man, in a slowly drifting boat, attached to a salmon. The boat constantly, to make things worse, turned round, at times being bow first, at times stern first, at others, drifting broadside on.

A hundred and twenty yards had run out—it was nearly all gone.

There were but a few turns of line left on the reel, when suddenly the great fish changed his direction. With a cowollop on the top like a porpoise, and then a third flying leap, he began now to dash towards the far side of the channel, slightly approaching the boat as he

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did so. This fortunately enabled the angler to get in some of his line. Then the fish came a little more towards him, yet he still managed to reel in as fast as the fish approached, so that never for an instant was there an inch of slack. For, as all salmon fishers know, if your line becomes slack, merely for an instant, you lose your fish in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred.

However, suddenly the fish veered, and came straight at the boat, the line fizzing as it cut through the water like a knife. No time to reel in now! With his left hand, as quick as lightning, the Admiral pulled in the line, letting it fall on the floor of the boat. Still, even in his hurry, the old sailor managed to do this so that the coils should fall clear of each other, and so would not be mixed up together in an inextricable jumble should the fish dash off again. Now the huge salmon is at the very boat! If he goes under it, the slender top of the rod will be dragged beneath and smashed, the line too will be broken—good-bye salmon!

Quick as thought, Sir Arthur dashed the butt end of his rod into the water with a splash. He almost struck the salmon as he did so, so close was it. Heavens! what a length of a fish he saw.

This action just saved the situation. The fish turned, leaving a huge swirling whirlpool on the top of the water as his huge tail, like the screw of a steamer, sent him flying off in a different direction. This time, it was up wind he sped, towards the entrance of the channel.

That did not matter so much now, for the boat had drifted well down it, therefore the action of the wind against its side would not help the fish, by increasing the distance rapidly, half so much as had he taken to the lake at first. But he never reached the lake. The Admiral now attempted to put on a little pressure; it succeeded, the salmon came back, tearing now down along the side of the island. There were feathery branches of trees hanging down into the water here and there.

To the horror of Sir Arthur the line actually caught against two of these in succession, but, such was the

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speed and force with which the immense *salmo salar* was travelling, that the boughs bent and gave way before the line in each instance.

At last the fish, as if tired of life, took a dash straight at the shore where there was a sandy beach. Up this it dashed in its headlong career, landing itself clean out of the water. It was flopping and springing about now on dry land; presently the great salmon lay quiescent. Oh! if there were only a pair of sculls in the boat, anything to dash on shore and seize the monster by the gills! But there was nothing whatever to stop the boat from drifting slowly away. And no amount of pulling could move that weight back again into the water. After the Admiral in the drifting boat had nearly let out all his line, as the distance separated him more and more from his fish, lying there high and dry as if on a fishmonger's slab, it began jumping again, up and down, head over heels, on the sand. Then it splashed into the shallow water on the brink, sending the foam flying.

After resting a little it recommenced its leaps until only its back remained out. Then it gains the deep water once more and sails away towards the centre of the channel—slowly.

Putting on the rod every ounce of pressure that he dared the Admiral forced the partly exhausted creature to come his way. It came, it came, nearer and nearer. But then it went down and sulked, nothing would budge it an inch from lying like a huge rock at the bottom. Now it was that Sir Arthur perceived the great peril he was in of getting his line broken. For he was rapidly drifting towards the low end of the channel, out on to the lake once more. The commander of the fleet was not going to give in for a trifle like that! His boat was still not far from the island, although at a point where there was no beach, nothing but trees. Nevertheless, taking off his watch with one hand he laid it on the bottom of the boat. Still holding his rod with one hand, he cautiously lowered himself over the stern of the dinghy into the water. Then Sir Arthur commenced

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swimming, striking out with his legs, pushing the boat before him with his left hand and at the same time carefully letting the line run off the rod held in his right hand.

Slowly he progressed, but at last to his delight he felt the bottom—he could stand. Pushing the boat into the branches of the trees he turned and faced his quarry, now giving it the butt so hard that his rod bent absolutely double.

Sir Arthur had been at least twenty minutes in this position, occasionally giving a sharp tap of the hand on the butt of his rod, when at length the jar of the line thus caused made the fish stop its sulking.

It began to move again, at first apparently only a foot or two at a time, then to give short rushes, but it had not either its old strength or spirit. It was now that the gallant fisherman realised that possibly he might have been able to kill his fish after all, if he only had a gaff hook. But he had no gaff! It was at the moment when the great salmon had commenced circling round and round on the surface of the water, lashing its tail at times, that the boat with the rescuers appeared, to find to their astonishment their chief thus standing up to his middle in water, holding on tight to something like a young whale.

“Have you brought the gaff?” he roared out in a voice of thunder, as his only salutation to the search-party.

When Montgomery replied that, having never thought at all about salmon, that indeed their sole anxiety having been about himself, they had no gaff, the situation became critical.

The Admiral’s language, from his waist-deep position in the water, became at first too nautical to be chronicled. However, after having let off the steam a bit, Sir Arthur calmed down and resigned himself to the inevitable. So he directed Harry to bring his boat quietly down to him close in to shore and hold a consultation.

Above all not to frighten that demon of a fish. For

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it was quite evident that something would have to be done, but—in the name of Neptune!—what? Heavens! supposing, as has happened with many a noble salmon, that the hold that had held secure for so long should break away at the very last moment. Awful thought! it made him shudder so that the water round his portly form trembled in little dimples. What if a last convulsive effort should snap the long-tried cast, and, with the “Silver Doctor” still firmly fixed in his jaws, the splashing silvery monster should go rolling away, first slowly sinking out of sight back into the depths, then down the Gambo and back into the sea?

And yet it seemed quite probable that this was what might happen after all.

Several plans to secure the beast were suggested in turn but rejected. Muirhead proposed, for instance, that they should bend a bowline on a line and noose the salmon round the body, in the manner usually followed for dragging in huge sharks when hooked. It was found, however, that the only line available was the painter of one of the boats, and it was feared that the sight of his would-be lassosers approaching with this thick rope would only incite the salmon to renewed struggles, with perhaps fatal results. Bill Jenkins suggested that he should swim to the fish, while the Admiral held it well up to the top, and seize it by the gills, then be hauled into the boat with his prey.

He had already been nearly drowned once, he said, and would not mind risking his life again in the least in such a cause. Sir Arthur, however, would have none of this. Harry Montgomery now proposed a variation of Jenkins’ plan, which was that he himself should swim to the salmon and stab it with a big knife. This, however, was also rejected unanimously by the rest of the council of war.

At last, it was Midshipman Conway who came to his chief’s assistance with a feasible plan.

“It’s all right, sir,” said the lad. “We’ll get him, never fear! I have already shot a big bear with my

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revolver this morning and I have got three cartridges left in it. Now I'll shoot the salmon."

"Shot a bear with your revolver! What the devil," but checking his curiosity as being premature and a commodity that would keep, the Admiral entered into the plan. It was agreed that first of all Sir Arthur was to be hauled into the ship's cutter, then that he was to be rowed gently towards the fish and by keeping the point of his rod well up, endeavour to get it close to the surface. Hugh Conway in the meantime, kneeling in the bow of the dinghy, was to be sculled by Harry Montgomery very gently and quietly up from the other side, to watch his opportunity and fire. A wonderful plan indeed! The first part of it, that of hauling the big man into the cutter, was the hardest, especially as he refused to loose his hold of the rod for a single second. Not, however, that anyone else wanted or dared to touch it—no, indeed!

This, however, was accomplished at length, the boat being nearly capsized in the endeavour.

So far so good, but the salmon evidently thought that he also had a say in the matter. No sooner did Sir Arthur attempt to reel him in close than this king of fishes, who had been merely resting while the consultation was going on, set off for a fresh cruise, apparently with all his old vigour. He made a splendid and unexpected run, once more tearing straight down the channel, entirely clearing its lower entrance and passing out into the lake beyond the island. Both boats pursued, and it was while the little flotilla were manœuvring to approach the still fighting fish once more that Geoffrey had perceived them from the shore. That run of the salmon was his last big effort, but he still struggled, splashed and rolled so that for another ten minutes or more there was not the slightest opportunity for the midshipman. Suddenly, when no one was in the least expecting it, there was a flash and a report.

The lad had taken his chance of a snapshot. The great fish sprang perpendicularly into the air. Again

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the revolver flashed and rang out. The tall Admiral felt something knock his hat off, but, with a splash like that of a rock falling into a pool, the salmon fell back into the water an inert mass of silver. He was dead at last! Hugh's first bullet had hit him sideways, at the back of his head, the second, fired while he was in the air, struck his spine, passed through his body, and then through the Admiral's hat.

"All's well that ends well," sung out Sir Arthur cheerfully, as they hauled the gigantic fish in; "but, by Jove! Mr Conway, you nearly made a bigger bag than I have! And yet, if I am not mistaken, this salmon weighs at least fifty pounds."

"Sixty, sir, at least!" was the unanimous cry of all the others. For were they not fishermen?

"Fifty or sixty, I expect he is by far the biggest salmon ever caught with the rod in Newfoundland, and you are a deuced good shot, Master Conway—so now tell me about the bear."

So, while they rowed back across the lake, gloating over the fish, they told Fighting Sir Arthur their respective bear stories.

CHAPTER XI

SILVER BELLS

THERE was a sound of barking dogs and the joyful cries of women and children, as three birch bark canoes were seen rapidly approaching a large island upon the bosom of Lake Nepigon, a lake a hundred miles in length. Through the tops of the fir trees upon the island thin wisps of smoke were seen lazily ascending, while, here and there, dotted about irregularly in the clearings, were observable Indian teepees or wigwams, formed of long poles covered with bark and skins.

More joyful still became the cries upon the strand as the six hunters, plying their paddles with renewed vigour at the sight of home, drew rapidly nigh, when it was plainly noticeable that each of the frail crafts was laden down dangerously low in the water with portions of the carcase of a wapiti, the huge red deer of the Canadian forests.

There were other game creatures in the canoes in addition to the wapiti ; a number of foolhens or partridges, some rabbits and some disjointed members of a young caribou, a calf of a year old, completed their burden. No wonder, with all this meat on board, that the gunwales of the canoes appeared scarcely a couple of inches above the water rippling so swiftly past their sinew-sewn sides. At length the canoes grated upon the strand when, uncere- moniously kicking on one side the savage wolf-like dogs of the Esquimo breed, four women and several children rushed forward to greet the hunters, and to greedily view the spoils of the chase, for meat had been scarce for a long time upon the island, forest fires upon the adjacent shores

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of the lake having driven all the animals away from its immediate neighbourhood.

Five of the hunters were Redskins of various ages, all men of powerful build. They wore moccasins upon their feet and loose shirts of tanned moose hide, while wide-brimmed felt hats completed a costume which was the same as that of the white man, who made the sixth of the party. Round each man's waist was a broad leather belt to which was attached a long sheath knife and, while each of the Indians had a Winchester repeating rifle, the white man, as he stepped out of his canoe, held in his hand a double-barrelled Express of British manufacture.

As it was evident that a squall of wind and rain was just about to sweep over the waters of the lake, none of these hunters wasted much time in replying to the greetings of the women. They, moccasin-shod like the men, were dressed in short petticoats, with bright shawls about their shoulders. Their smooth black hair was uncovered, and gathered into a plait at each side of the head. It might have been noticed, as the squaws and men alike rapidly unloaded the canoes, that two of the latter cast frequent glances towards another figure of a woman in the distance. This was that of a young girl leaning over a camp-fire who, although she glanced occasionally towards the busy party by the canoes, did not leave the work she had in hand, but modestly refrained from coming forward.

The men who looked over towards the camp-fire were Kichipinné or Big Partridge, the Chief of the party of Indians, who was her father, and the white man. Despite the brown beard which now shields the lower part of his face, despite also the five years which have passed over his head since we saw him last in Newfoundland, it is easy to recognise Geoffrey Digby.

At length Kichipinné, the Chief, impatiently addressed his wife, who had been baptized Miriam. "What is Silver Bells doing yonder? Why does she not come hither to greet her father and his braves? She knows well that we should not ask her to soil her dainty fingers with the

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caribou meat. Perhaps, however," continued the brawny Redskin, with a touch of irony, "the daughter of Kichipinné might not object to assisting the squaws to carry up that wapiti skin, since," he glanced at Geoffrey, "the white chief shot it."

"The priest is still very sick with fever, she makes him some broth," replied Miriam, also glancing at Geoffrey, but impassively. "Still Miriam will call the daughter of the Crees! Silver Bells! Silver Bells!"

Carefully depositing by the side of the fire the object which she had in her hand, the maiden arose.

As the Indian girl advanced slowly and shyly towards the shore, there was heard the tinkling sound of music, such as is made by a sleigh whirling by upon the snow. This was explained when, as her lissom figure came nearer, it could be seen that around each of her high moose skin moccasins, which were richly trimmed with bead work, she wore an anklet. These anklets were composed of narrow strips of ermine skin, in the fur of which was sewn a circlet of small sleigh bells of silver, which jingled musically as she walked. From earliest infancy it had been the young maid's custom to wear these trinkets, which had been given her by her father. Thus, throughout the tribe of Crees to which she belonged, the Chief's daughter had never been known by any other name than that of Silver Bells.

The young girl was clad more richly than the other women, and her carriage, as she approached, was graceful in the extreme. Her features also were more regular and refined than those of any of the other Indians of either sex. She was about nineteen years of age, and possessed glorious dark eyes which seemed to swim with a velvet-like softness. Upon her dark face, which was a pure oval in shape, there shone the ruddy tinge of youthful health, while her bust and limbs were admirably proportioned. The feet and hands of this maid of the forests were slender and small, seeming to betoken high breeding. To complete her charm, her mouth was

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small, while the tender sensitive lips but partly concealed admirable teeth.

Such, then, was Silver Bells as she walked up to her father's side and greeted him with a modest bearing. For a second Big Partridge looked upon his daughter with evident pride, then embraced her rapidly. After this, as the young girl remained standing shyly before him, with cast-down eyes as if she would not attract notice to herself, her father gave a short laugh. "Ugh ! Silver Bells, have you then no greeting for the braves of the Crees ? Yonder is your brother, Soaring Swan. Here, too, is the white chief, Ready Rifle. He it was who, by a splendid long shot, killed the big elk. Surely he should be thanked, when all of you here have needed meat. Ready Rifle and Kichipinné have been partners in the hunting, and, while none like the Chief of the Crees can follow a trail, the pale face can shoot dead with the gun. He has given the Chief of the Crees that fine head and antlers, which will sell for five dollars at least at the Hudson Bay post."

"Oh ! Ready Rifle, how kind you are," exclaimed Silver Bells, going up to Geoffrey and extending her hand, while her cheeks reddened through the dark skin. "How good a shot you are. Silver Bells hopes you will stay in the lodges of the Crees a long time. So does Father Antony," she added hurriedly.

"I hope so, too, Silver Bells," replied Geoffrey, as he pressed the slender fingers, "for I am happy with your people ; it is only since I became one of your family that I have found rest. But how is the good priest ? is he better ?"

"No, he is worse, Ready Rifle. Silver Bells has been able to give him nothing to eat but fish, and was making him some fish broth, although it is not good for him. But now, the Virgin be thanked ! he can have some meat !"

"Yes, indeed, Silver Bells, Soaring Swan has some partridges, go to him and get one from him at once, the deer meat is too fresh and strong for a man with fever. Tell Father Antony I will come and see him as soon as

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we have got through all the work here. There will be a lot to do, and I must not shirk my share, but help your father. Oh ! stay a minute, would you like to have my wapiti skin for your lodge ? I will cure it for you."

"Oh ! Ready Rifle, Silver Bells cannot take it. You will be leaving us some day, and then you will want to take it with you, it is such a beauty."

"No, I will never take it with me. If you will not have it, Silver Bells, it will be sold at the Hudson Bay post, but as it is the finest I have ever seen, I would rather you had it to keep your feet warm in winter time."

"Thank you, Ready Rifle, Silver Bells will take it. Now she will go to Soaring Swan for a partridge. You always seem to think of everything and everybody but yourself."

The maiden turned and left him, after a lingering look from her dewy eyes which swam with unexpressed imaginings. It might be suppressed admiration and wonder at this white man's prowess which made the soft dark orbs glisten so, it might be gratitude only, but, although he made no sign in return, the virginal glance of the untutored Indian maiden was not lost upon the young hunter, it sank into his heart and thrilled it strangely.

During the years that had elapsed since we left him upon the Gambo Lake his had been a solitary existence. Upon arrival at Halifax, although Geraldine McGeorge had insisted upon his coming to pass a day or two at her house, and even begged him as a personal favour to remain for a ball which she gave for the Admiral and officers of the fleet, his momentary expansion towards her had ceased. He had seen through her design of weaning him from his ideas of seeking solitude in the backwoods, and had, in his quiet way, resented being made a hero of for the benefit of all the officers and ladies of Halifax, in which laudable endeavour Geraldine had been assisted by her brother Harry to her heart's content.

Although, therefore, Geoffrey had waited for the ball,

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at which he neither moped nor said with a bored expression that he did not dance, but behaved like any ordinary young man, he had been inexpressibly annoyed when each of his partners in succession had talked to him about the wonderful feats of prowess which he had performed, in twice saving Lady McGeorge's life. The next day he turned his back upon Halifax, after a farewell interview with his hostess, who appeared more moved than he at the parting.

During this interview, Geraldine reiterated all that she had said to him when nursing him aboard the *Renown*, and extracted from Geoffrey a promise that if ever he returned to civilisation he would visit her. She succeeded with difficulty in making him promise to write to her occasionally from his wilds, if ever he had the opportunity of doing so, and then they had parted.

It was perhaps as well for the peace of mind of the young married woman that Geoffrey had thus hurried his departure, but he, for his part, as he sped westward by train to the Province of Quebec, felt nothing whatever save fraternal feelings of regret at saying farewell to this elegant woman of a world he now renounced and sought never more to enter.

During the first year of his wanderings on the Canadian continent he found his heart returning completely to scenes of home and the wrongs that he had suffered there at the hands of his faithless love. The more recent episodes in the island of Newfoundland faded gradually from his mind, remaining solely as an interlude in a dream. Nevertheless, letters from Geraldine McGeorge reached him from time to time at out of the way Hudson Bay Posts, as also did letters from home, but, as he had only replied twice in a period of twelve months, Geraldine gradually ceased writing to him altogether, although the warmth of her gratitude and friendship never abated towards her preserver.

As time wore on, Geoffrey Digby, who had at first merely hunted, shot and fished for amusement only,

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found the love of the backwoods growing upon him more and more. His wanderings had chiefly lain in a northerly direction, and it was while wintering in a post belonging to the Hudson Bay Company, on James's Bay, that he had made up his mind what to do with his life, which it seemed to him that he was merely wasting. Having made up his mind, he put his project into execution and wrote to his father, a letter which angered the Squire of Thornham exceedingly. In this letter he told his parents that, since he now found himself in a position to maintain himself by his own exertions, he did not feel justified in continuing to draw the ample allowance afforded him. This sum, he stated, he had hitherto merely expended for the benefit of half-breed or Indian *voyageurs*, guides and hunters, for whom he had no longer any need since he now intended to become a hunter and a guide upon his own account. All that he wished for was, he said, the sum of two hundred pounds to be placed to his credit at a bank in Quebec, to be able to draw upon in any hour of need, for the purchase of canoes, camp outfit or provisions. The allowance his father had made him he wished him now to devote to some more useful and worthy object than that of maintaining a son in idleness. It might, he suggested, be far better employed in the improvement of the cottages upon the Thornham estate.

Angry indeed was the letter which Mr Digby, who could not understand his son's quixotic ideas, penned in return. But neither that nor letters from his mother and sister, begging him to give up his ridiculous ideas and return home, moved Geoffrey in the least.

From that time forth young Digby became a professional hunter and guide. Sometimes trapping and shooting upon his own account, occasionally acting for the Hudson Bay Company, as *voyageur* upon wild northern rivers or driving teams of dog-sleighs upon the ice in winter, always leading a life of adventure, often one of hardship, he continued steadfastly the career which he had mapped out for himself.

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While, however, in this manner easily earning far more than enough to support his simple wants, it is not to be supposed that Geoffrey Digby's nature suffered in the least by contact with the rough men—white trappers, half-breeds and savages—who were his sole companions. On the contrary, he remained ever a gentleman, one whose lips no foul word ever disgraced, even in the moments of greatest excitement. And even with those rough backwoodsmen, who, upon first meeting him would at times, when half drunk, swear at him as a milksop, he soon found the way to make himself respected. Moreover, this way was not usually by the use of force. Powerful as he was, force he indeed employed at times, but on behalf of others not of himself. His moral superiority, his personal weight of character, his calm cool presence of mind and resource in moments of danger, his wonderful precision with the rifle or gun, his splendid dexterity with the paddle in some terrible rapid: these were the things which impressed the mind of all the wild men who came in contact with him. These attributes it was which made his soubriquet of Ready Rifle well known and named with respect by the Indians and half-breeds all through Northern Canada, from Lake St John in the Province of Quebec to far away Winnipegosis in Manitoba.

CHAPTER XII

A BAND OF BEARS

AT the time that we meet him again, upon the island at the southern part of Lake Nepigon, Geoffrey Digby had been with the party of Cree Indians for nearly a month. The time of year was the middle of September, and his presence in that neighbourhood was accounted for as follows. Having met in the northern part of Ontario, upon James's Bay, a half-breed whom he had known previously, this man had suggested to him a lucrative partnership. His name was Wilson, and he was the same man who had once had an adventure with a bear, which adventure Geoffrey had thought about in his own moment of danger with Bruin on the shores of the Gambo Lake. The fact of the two men having both had the same experience, each having gripped the muzzle of a bear with his hand, had drawn them together. It was one night round the camp-fire that Wilson told Geoffrey about the bears in the Nepigon district, relating some interesting facts as follows, speaking in the Soto language, which Digby now knew well. "You see, Ready Rifle, bears are very thick indeed round about the north shore of Lake Superior, in the district around the Nepigon River, which is, by the way, the finest river in the world for trout. It is there that I come from, about ten miles to the north of where the Nepigon empties itself into that vast inland sea, Superior.

"My home, where I was born, is a village with a French name situated in the forest, a little above a lake called Lake Helen, one of the quiet lakes formed by the

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Nepigon, as it to rest itself at times from the tearing turmoil of its terrible rapids.

"The Village du Sacré Cœur, which consists of substantial wooden houses, each in a clearing of its own, is inhabited by Indians and half-breeds, although there is very little of the white man about any of us, there being more of the Ojibboway than the European about us all. Most of the inhabitants, however, even some of the full blood Indians, go by French names, every second man you meet being either a La Ronde or a Deschamps. The La Rondes think themselves very grand, being, so they say, descended from a French Marquis de Saint Simon, a Royalist expelled from France at the time of the French Revolution. At anyrate, the Marquis seems to have left a pretty good stock of Ojibboway descendants behind him, so if they want any more of his lot in France they will know where to look for them. I, myself, am descended on one side from a Scotchman, and, with several other half-breeds of Scotch descent, we used to have downright battles at times with our French fellow-villagers. That, however, is done with now, we are all friends again, and this is how it came about. There was a certain half-breed named Deschamps, who had a house in the Village du Sacré Cœur, right out in the forest. This man married a La Ronde, with whom I had had a little bit of a love affair myself. Now, when he had married the girl I did not care a bit, but Denis Deschamps never forgave me for having been preferred before him, and never lost an opportunity of doing me an ill turn. He shot at me once, vowing that it was by accident; upon another occasion he managed to loose all his Eskimo dogs upon my trail, thinking that they would tear me to pieces. They were not pure bred 'huskies,' but half huskey, half mastiff, and I had great difficulty in getting away with my life."

Here Wilson stopped, took a drink and laughed, as he added drolly: "Denis Deschamps took some years to breed a fresh pack of sleigh dogs after that!

"Well, Ready Rifle," he continued, "you will easily

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understand that I was not particularly likely to return good for evil. Whatever the Scotch ancestors of the Wilson family might have done, the Ojibboway part of me isn't built that way. I was accordingly meditating some revenge, and had in fact made up my mind to kill Denis Deschamps, when my old affection for Alice la Ronde, his wife, made me do something else quite the contrary."

"Which I am quite sure you don't regret now, Wilson, for you are a good-hearted fellow for all your blustering," interrupted Geoffrey. "But you were going to tell me about bears."

"No," replied the half-breed again, "I don't regret it now, Ready Rifle, and this is all about bears, as you will see, although you know we Indians tell a story in a round about way, and have to go through all the details, even back to our ancestors of the French Revolution, or 'Caledonia stern and wild.'" These last words Wilson said in English, which he could speak well enough if he chose, and French also for that matter, although, like many "breeds," he always spoke Indian for choice. "Well," he continued in the Soto language, "you must know that it is a terrible country for wild beasts down there, and especially for bears."

"In the springtime, about the month of June, they, both black and brown bears, collect in bands, sometimes there being some of each colour in a band. They are mostly males, as many as twenty at times, sometimes perhaps not more than three, but never more than from one to three females among them. Then they fight and kill each other and will attack any man and tear him to pieces. They will follow an Indian by his scent until he gets to water, when they lose it. Fortunately, however, they won't climb a tree after a man at that period of the year; why, I don't know, but it is a fact. If they did I should not be here. I tell you, Ready Rifle, it is an awful noise they make—yelling like half-choked cats and bellowing like mad bulls—even sometimes

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crying just like a man shouting. It makes a man's blood run cold to hear it—and makes one thirsty to remember it too."

"I should think so indeed," said Geoffrey, passing the whisky. "I hope I shall be spared the pleasure. But take a drink and go ahead."

Wilson, having wetted his lips, proceeded: "One June, about ten years ago, I happened to be coming home through the forest and was at some distance from the village when I passed Denis Deschamps' little girl, called Alice like her mother, whom also she resembled, not dark but fair haired, a child of six years old. She was chasing butterflies and picking flowers in a clearing. I called her to come to me, for I knew the danger there always was of bears, but the child, who was self-willed, ran away and even threw a piece of wood at me which struck me in the face. At the same time, with the retentive memory which children often have, she said that I was *un mauvais cochon*, that her father had said so, and also that neither woman nor child was safe with me.

"I boiled over at that, and I believe would willingly have wrung her neck if it had not been that she looked just like her mother used to look at me, in moments when she used to be saucy and expected to be caught and kissed. So, telling her that she could tell her father to go to the devil, I left her and continued my way. I had not gone far, however, when in the distance, coming down wind, I heard the most fearful pandemonium. It was as if all the furies of hell had broken loose. I waited a second and listened. Good God! Ready Rifle, I knew what it was—a whole pack or bears, while from the direction from which the sound came I knew that they would strike my trail, if, indeed, they had not already struck it and were after me! I turned and ran for my life. I knew I had just time enough to reach my house!"

"And the child?" asked Geoffrey, breathless with excitement, "what about the child?"

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"I am coming to that. Wait a minute, I must wet my lips again first, for now I am going to be for a long time without a drink, I assure you, Ready Rifle. Well, I remembered that child, and for a moment thought of leaving her to her fate, for I knew of course that bears following my scent would find her and devour her. 'That will serve you out finely,' I thought, 'Denis Deschamps, for teaching your little girl to call me "bad pig," and for telling her that "neither woman nor child is safe with me."' So I laughed for joy, and turned again to run. Suddenly, however, I thought of Alice la Ronde, the child's mother. I thought of her arms that used once to cling about my neck, of her kisses which I still remembered upon my lips. Above all, I thought of her eyes—those eyes that I had just seen looking at me from the little girl's face. And so, Ready Rifle—I turned and ran—but I ran the other way!"

"Back to the child?"

"Yes, back to the child—and, by Heaven! I was only just in time. Just as I reached the edge of the clearing I met the terrified little girl screaming with fear.

"At the same moment a whole band of bears, brown and black, growling, yelling and howling, tearing and clawing at each other, and rolling about, came bursting into the clearing like demented creatures. The forest trees re-echoed with the appalling sound that they made. I never thought that such terrible noises existed in the world. No wonder that I lost my head for a moment!"

"You lost your head, Wilson! How? What happened?"

"Why, instead of running, as that child, who did not call me bad pig now, rushed up to me and threw her little arms around my legs, like a fool I stood there, terrified—rooted to the spot, gazing at the huge bears. I was too horror-stricken to move."

"Well, what in the name of Heaven saved you?"

"The child's hat. It was the little girl's hat that saved

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us — a big hat tied with bright red ribbons — Alice always loved red. You see, the little girl had been filling her hat with flowers. When she ran she dropped it into the middle of the clearing. As the bears rushed in, the first two of them—both shes—ran up to it and began sniffing at it—poking it with their noses. Then all the other bears, fifteen or sixteen of them, overtook and surrounded the two shes, fighting with each other all over and round them. Some with frightful cries were rolling over and over, some, bellowing while standing on their hind legs, were wrestling with each other, all seemed to be in one great confused mass of brown and black. It was, Ready Rifle, the most terrifying thing I ever saw, so terrifying that I made a second mistake—and this was my second mistake. As I stood there, spellbound, I should have realised that the males were all too busy fighting over the females at that moment to think of us. I, however, never thought of that, or we could, I believe, have escaped all right unobserved. Instead of attempting to do so, I looked at the tree under which I was standing and thought of climbing it. It was a big spruce, the lowest sound bough of which was so high from the ground that, tall man as I am, I could only reach it with a jump. I knew, however, that I could do it. But I had my gun with me. I could not possibly jump at that bough, clutch it, draw both myself and the little girl up with me and take my rifle as well. I stooped and told the child to jump on my back and clutch me round the neck—to clutch tight. She was intelligent enough, as you have seen by her remarks. There was no fear of her not clutching on tight enough—she clung like a monkey. Then—here was my great error—I fired my rifle bang into the middle of that seething mass of bears, then dropping it, sprang for the bough. I seized it with both arms, threw both legs around it, and in a second was sitting securely upon the bough above it, with one arm round the tree. How it was all done I know not, but terror made me more active than usual, I

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suppose, and in a minute I had my belt off, round the child, and fast to my left arm. Unless I fell now, the child could not fall."

"And the bears?" asked Geoffrey. "What did the bears do after you fired? Did you shoot any?"

"Yes, that was the worst of it, I did. My bullet went right through two of the males and wounded one of the females as well. Had she not been wounded they might all have gone away; as it was they stayed and came for my tree."

"What, all of them?"

"No, not all of them. One of the big males was dying, but him the other wounded one seized by the throat and tore it open; then some of the others attacked that one. He fought for his life for a long time, and as he was not badly wounded made a precious good fight of it, especially as the wound had made him savage and he was the biggest bear of the lot—a black one. At last they pulled him down, under the very tree we were sitting in, and literally tore him to pieces. There were now two dead he bears, you see, Ready Rifle, and the wounded she. All the time they were looking up and roaring and yelling at us, but never a one of them made an effort to climb the tree, and I assure you I said, Thank God! for that—at first."

"Why at first, Wilson?"

"Well, you see, I had to stop there so long—two complete nights and days—suffering from hunger and thirst, and the little one crying so that I soon wished myself dead instead of sitting up in that tree!"

"Two whole days—how awful! Well, how on earth did you get away in the end?"

"Well, I'm coming to that presently. You see, there was one of the she bears wounded, and the other female ran off at times but always came back again. Well, the whole gang remained round about those two, some of them sometimes going away into the woods for a while, pursuing the she that was not wounded, while some stopped, trying to understand what was the matter

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with the one that was. Then at times they would all of them come round together, marching round roaring under our tree, or standing up upon their hind legs and growling at me. So it went on day and night. One large he bear there was, though, that scarcely ever quitted the side of the wounded she as she lay there with her shoulder broken; he licked the place nearly all the time. At last the poor brute died, then all the rest ran right away into the forest—but still that big brute remained. Meanwhile, we two were dying almost of thirst, at least I was. I made the little one all right after a bit.”

“Why, what on earth did you do for her, Wilson, that you could not do for yourself?”

“Oh! just this, Ready Rifle. You see, as I was getting cramped holding her, I had to take her higher up in the tree and strap her round to the trunk, where it was thin enough for my belt to go round it and her. Also I got exercise in that way. Well, when I had fastened her up, I opened a vein in my arm with my knife and made the little one take a good long suck. That saved her, you see.”

“Upon my soul, Wilson, you are a noble fellow,” exclaimed Geoffrey, “and deserve the Victoria Cross. But how did you get out of it in the end?”

“Oh—that was simple enough and you know about it already. When I was quite sure there was only that one bear left, I slipped down the tree and tackled him, as you did yours in Newfoundland. At least, I had picked up my gun, which the bears had never touched and was trying to load it, when he came for me. After a wrestle, when he grabbed at me and I held his mouth, the gun fell; but presently I threw him, picked the rifle up and brained him with it, the nipple—for it was a muzzle-loader—crashing into the skull over his temple. And then I took the child and went home to find that Denis Deschamps and his wife and the whole village, who had heard the bears growling and rampaging for two days, imagined that we had both been eaten at least forty-eight hours before.”

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“Well, what did Deschamps say then?” asked Geoffrey.

“That I can’t remember, for about the time I got home and gave the little girl up to her mother, I fainted, for I had lost a lot of blood which I gave to little Alice, besides some that the bear let out of my carcase. But since I was, as I said, such a long time without a drink, I think I will now finish off my glass of grog and turn into my blankets. I will tell you about my plan to-morrow.”

On the morrow, the plan which Wilson disclosed was that Geoffrey and he should take some canoes by lake steamer to Port Arthur on Lake Superior, and that then they should look out for some rich Americans going about on the steamers in search of sport, and take parties of them up the Nepigon River for the magnificent fishing. Wilson promised to teach Ready Rifle the navigation of the difficult rapids of the river, and to engage two of the very La Rondes he had spoken about as their partners. This plan had proved eminently successful, and Geoffrey and Wilson had both become many dollars the richer by the middle of August. Then, having heard that Father Antony was on an island on Lake Nepigon with a party of Crees, Geoffrey joined his old friend there.

CHAPTER XIII

A MEETING IN THE WILDS

THE surprise that Father Antony experienced when he recognised in the bearded *voyageur* the man who had saved him from the wreck of the *Bosnia* was only equalled by his delight—a delight equally shared by Geoffrey Digby. The latter found the worthy missionary much changed, being now thin and hectic in appearance, although his spirit was as buoyant as ever. The little band of Crees, with whom Geoffrey found him, were, so he stated, a remnant of that very tribe with whom in former days he had gone on the warpath against the Sioux, while Kichipinné was the identical Chief who had, upon that memorable occasion, insisted upon slaughtering the women and children of the foe.

The tribe had been not only decimated by smallpox since those days but split up into small groups, most of whom had become addicted to civilisation and agriculture, accepting, from the hands of the Government, lands on various Indian Reserves, agricultural implements to till them with, and horses and cattle thrown in. Big Partridge, however, had too proud a spirit ever to “take treaty,” as it is called. He despised the treaty Indians, and always spoke with contempt of those Redskins of his tribe who accepted the Government bounty and now lived in houses. As for him, he had been born in a teepee, had never acknowledged the rule of any man, and never intended to so long as he lived.

Nevertheless, proud as was his spirit, even Kichipinné and his family had had to move with the times. There-

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fore, instead of the head-dress of feathers and the wampum belt, which had adorned his warrior form when first Father Antony had come across the path of this Chief of the Crees, a felt hat instead of a crest of eagle feathers now crowned the once warlike head. Also, the wampum girdle of yore was replaced by the less showy but more serviceable leathern belt of to-day. Two of the others Indians on the island, Crested Crane and Eagle Plumes, were younger brothers of the Chief ; a third, named Kichiamik or Big Beaver, had been one of the braves formerly first in every bloody foray ; while the remaining and youngest Redskin of the lot was, as we know, Soaring Swan, the Chief's son. All of these, with exception of the latter, were married, and all were Christians, the elder ones, with their wives, having been converted by Father Antony many years ago, while the younger members of the tribe, including Silver Bells, had been baptized by the priest either at or within a year or two of their birth. For Father Antony had not resided continuously in the wigwams of Kichipinné and his band, although he had always made of the lodge of the Chief of the Crees his headquarters. Thence he would sally forth in one place to return to it in another, after an absence spent in missionary work sometimes extending to years in duration. He had but recently returned from one of these prolonged absences, during which he had been ministering upon the distant prairies of the Saskatchewan, more as a doctor than as a pastor, to the bad-headed, bad-hearted Blackfeet Indians, among whose ranks smallpox and drunkenness combined had been working sad havoc. Kichipinné and his few remaining followers hated the very name of the Blackfeet. Nevertheless, they had been imbued by the priest himself with sufficient of the Christian spirit to accept with resignation the fact of these ministrations of their old friend and teacher to their quondam enemies, the destroyers of the buffalo and scourge of the plains.

Great, however, had been the joy of the tribal remnant on the island when, upon his return, Father Antony had

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told them he would now leave them no more for any prolonged periods, especially when he added that even his priestly patience had been exhausted by the horse-stealing Blackfeet, who, notwithstanding that he daily risked his life in their foul lodges, had ungratefully pilfered him of all his belongings. Fortunately, however, he had left in charge of Miriam, Kichipinné's squaw, the manuscript of such parts of his Indian Bible as had not yet been printed in the Indian characters. He was now engaged in completing that great work, much of which was written upon thin sheets of birch bark, which his Cree friends had delighted in skilfully preparing for him when camping in far-away forests and muskegs where writing paper was a luxury unknown. To Father Antony, recluse as he had been in the wilds, Geoffrey came as a breath of civilisation. For he, at all events, had occasionally been among white men. Thus he brought news of that world of civilisation, which had been an entirely sealed book to the priest from the time when, five years previously, he had sailed away from the coasts of Newfoundland in his little white-sailed schooner.

The meeting between the pair had indeed been a happy one. Upon that first evening, in the wigwam which the two henceforward shared, many were the questions which the man of Jesuit training put to his once rescuer from a watery grave concerning the further movements of the Admiral and his party on board the *Renown* after he himself had sailed for the shores of Nova Scotia. For, although not now of the world, Father Antony had in his younger days been an ornament to many a salon, and he still, notwithstanding his voluntary exile, delighted to hear about people of the world whom he had known and who spoke with other than an Indian tongue.

Thus it came to pass that Geoffrey found himself, in his efforts to please his friend, obliged to talk about, and dwell upon in his mind once more, all those with whom they had mutually come in contact. He was even forced to undergo from the priest, who was not without *une*

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pointe de malice in his character, a little good-humoured badinage upon the evident impression which he had created upon the beautiful Lady McGeorge. For that such had been the case had not escaped the perceptions of the astute priest. Moreover, as Father Antony evidently held the lady in question in the highest admiration, Geoffrey found himself compelled to listen to the Padre's self-gratulatory remarks upon her conversion by him from atheism, coupled with encomiums upon her *esprit* and attributes. To these were added his match-making regrets: that the brilliant woman of the world had not happened to have been a widow or a spinster at the time that she and Geoffrey had met. "For," said he, "without wishing any ill-will to her ancient and amiable spouse, I cannot help thinking, my dear Mr Digby, that a brilliant and cultivated young woman like Lady McGeorge would have made a much more suitable partner for yourself. However, who knows! one day perhaps," he added with a laugh, "you will go back from these wilds to find her free and unfettered, while, like Penelope with her distaff, keeping her crowds of suitors at a distance until Prince Charming returns to her from his forests and mountains." As, although Father Antony knew, from words overheard by him, uttered by the young man in his delirium, that there had already been a love affair in Geoffrey's career, it was evident that, in his character as ex-man of the world, he did not think its after effects could be of such potency as to drive the thoughts of all other womanhood from his friend's head save the recollection of one shattered ideal. Geoffrey, therefore, could but acknowledge the priest as being perfectly justified in this harmless chatter of "what might have been." Nevertheless, he felt within himself that had Geraldine been five years ago as free as air it would have been all the same to him. Therefore, as he related his further adventures in Newfoundland to the good-natured priest, he was able quite naturally and without any *mauvaise honte* to talk over the good qualities of his former nurse, while however warmly disclaiming the

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inference that she had ever displayed towards himself any *penchant* sufficient to give rise to suggestions of aught save dispassionate friendship.

Whereupon Father Antony smiled, changed the subject and asked for further details of the bear fight, of young Conway's prowess therein, and of Sir Arthur's adventures with the salmon.

Of that finny monster he remarked, "I expect that by this time, if we could only meet the gallant old Admiral, we should find that the salmon weighed at least seventy pounds."

Geoffrey laughed as he replied, "Well, do you know, Father Antony, that I think eighty would be far nearer the mark than seventy by this time; for his noble dimensions had already reached the latter respectable figure before I left Halifax."

Then the priest asked Digby about his own recent angling experiences with the Americans, to whom he had been acting as guide, only to find that, as in Newfoundland, he had strictly restricted himself to ministering to the pleasures of others without enjoying the relaxation of angling himself.

"Never mind," said Father Antony, "you shall make up for lost time now with a little relaxation, and, if you choose, that no later than to-morrow morning, for you are on the very spot for the biggest lake trout in creation. I must tell you that I have here a little *protégée*, in the shape of the Chief's daughter, who daily provides me with fish. They will insist upon calling her by the heathenish name of Silver Bells, although I myself duly baptized the child with the more Christian patronymics of Anna Maria. I shall, therefore, when you feel inclined, ask her to take you to the shoal where the big fish lie, which is her own secret. For, the men being so often away hunting, little Silver Bells, as I have to call her, has to provide fish not only for all of us left here in camp, but also for these great hungry huskey dogs, which would eat us all up if their ravenous maws were not well satisfied with meat of some kind or other. I

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think I also will go fishing to-morrow," added the priest, "for, after all my labours among the Blackfeet wretches, I cannot do better than follow the example of Our Lord and the blessed Apostles, just to make me think of something more wholesome than my sojourn in their unhealthy lodges. By the bye," he continued somewhat anxiously, "do you not notice, my friend, how much pulled down I am? I fear—although pray do not breathe it to our good friends here—that my constitution is shattered for ever, and that I shall never be much good for anything again."

Although, to his grief, Geoffrey did indeed notice how utterly unlike his former self Father Antony had become, he tried to reassure the priest, and then, because he found it impossible to throw conviction into his tones, hastily changed the subject once more back to that of the great lake trout.

Whereupon Father Antony, who plainly understood his consideration, rose from his couch of sweet-scented Canada balsam and, stepping without his wigwam, called "Silver Bells!"

Presently the young Indian girl shyly entered. And thus, under the deerskin-covered poles of the good Padre's teepee, had the daughter of the Crees first been presented to Geoffrey Digby.

CHAPTER XIV

THE GREAT NAMAYCUSH

As, to the accompanying tinkle of the silver bells fastened round the beaded moose skin moccasins upon her feet, the maiden entered the lodge, Geoffrey Digby mentally took stock of her charms, and did so with some astonishment. For while she too gazed, with eyes which she scarcely dared to raise from the ground, upon the far-famed Ready Rifle, whose form she had but dimly observed as he first landed from his canoe, he could not but acknowledge that this was no ordinary Indian girl that stood before him. Many indeed were the squaws, young and old, with whom he had come in contact during his wanderings. Many of the old ones had been repulsive—many of the young ones had been handsome, but, in all alike, there had been ever present the almost ineradicable look of the savage. They had always seemed to him to have somewhere at the back of the eye a latent cruelty or ferocity, no matter how shapely their forms or handsome their faces. In them he had always felt there existed, despite the smiling faces which his presence had often encountered, that savagery of instinct, which had so often in times gone by incited the Indian braves to torture their prisoners at the stake, while themselves looking on with taunting cries or inventing new devilish torments for the unhappy captives. Silver Bells, however, from the first moment was a revelation. The features of her face revealed the pure beauty of the soul. There was not merely maidenly modesty displayed in that oval face, with its reddening tones deepening in the flickering flames of the firelight, but more—far more,

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Both intelligence and goodness flashed forth from the pellucid depths of those soft dewy eyes, in the rapid inquiring glance which Silver Bells exchanged with the young hunter, when Father Antony bade her take the hand of Ready Rifle. It was Father Antony himself who did nearly all the talking during the first meeting, for both the young man and the maid were reserved and silent, thinking, wondering about each other.

The girl, indeed, in reply to the priest's remarks, spoke far more than the hunter himself, who, although not appearing to do so in any manner that was embarrassing, was observing, endeavouring to understand this graceful product of the wilds; becoming momentarily convinced, as he listened to the musical tones of her Indian tongue, that it was Father Antony's influence for good, exercised from early childhood upon receptive soil, which had educated the sensitive soul of this savage maiden until it was elevated far above the surroundings in which it had first seen the light. Although the casket which concealed it was a product of the woods, rivers and mountains, the soul itself was Christianised and civilised. While noticing how the goodness of the girl shone through her regular features, Geoffrey at the same time observed with pleasure the womanly deference and affection with which she treated Father Antony. He took it in, although probably neither the priest nor the girl were themselves aware of the fact, that here, in the priest himself, was her real father, far more indeed than in the stalwart Redskin, Kichipinné, the erstwhile slaughterer of Sioux women and children. And as he sat and listened and pondered upon all this, a kind of sorrowful feeling entered into Geoffrey's mind, as he thought of what might be the future of this beautiful creature, brought up to refined cleanliness both of body and mind, to be relegated one day to the savage arms of some unsavoury Redskin, with no higher object in life than to cook his dinner, make and mend his nets, caulk with the fragrant resin the gaping seams of his birch bark

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canoe. Not but that—here Geoffrey's philosophy as a hunter came to his rescue—these were all laudable and excellent occupations enough, and surely such that he, who had left civilisation for the wilderness, had no cause to despise.

But why had he left that civilisation? For a woman—And here, too, was a woman! Yes, she was more than a beast of burden, this graceful Indian girl, she was a woman with a soul—a soul evidently trained to be capable of more than passive obedience, a soul that might be capable of loving passionately, devotedly.

Meanwhile Silver Bells herself, while riveting with difficulty her attention upon the Father's remarks bearing upon the proposed fishing excursion upon which he wished her to conduct him and their guest upon the morrow, was taking in with receptive eyes the quiet and manly bearing of the celebrated Ready Rifle, he whose soubriquet among the Indians was the synonym for all that was courageous.

What stories, magnified, no doubt, with the exaggeration of the Indians' tales of the camp-fire, had she not already heard of the promptitude in danger, the unerring aim, the good heart of this, the only white man save Father Antony to whom she had ever yet spoken, the only young white man whose firm grip had ever enclasped her slender fingers. Was it not of this very Ready Rifle of whom it was related that when, some eighteen months previously, a band consisting of forty Indians—men, women and children—had been destroyed by the great timber wolves upon the shores of Lac Seul, he alone it was who with wonderful daring had come in his canoe, driven off the wolves, and rescued the two survivors from the tree in which they had been starving for days? Again, was it not Ready Rifle, who when a party of six half-breeds and Indians were returning in dog sleighs in the spring from the Hudson Bay post of Fort Albany, had rescued them all from the broken-up floating ice, upon which they were rapidly being dashed away to destruction in the furious rapids? And was it

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not Ready Rifle once more who one winter near Fort Cumberland, when a famished wolverine had nearly killed a sick and wounded man, had, although himself unarmed, seized and killed the fierce brute with only his hands and teeth? And yet, how quiet and inoffensive appeared to be the brown-bearded hero of all these exploits and of many others! Silver Bells had expected to find in him a man of truculent and bloodthirsty appearance, something perhaps like that of Eagle Plumes or Big Beaver, who also were brave men. But white men, so it seemed to her perceptions now, evidently did not require to be cruel and overbearing in their ways and looks to be marvellously courageous. Ready Rifle looked, so she thought, as if a little child might sit upon his knee and pull his fair beard without being repelled or spoken to roughly. How kind, how noble were his revered features! She did not feel in the least that she feared him as she had fancied that she would have done. No, Silver Bells felt almost as if she herself would not have minded being that little child—so great was the confidence with which she felt inspired by the first appearance and greeting of this mighty hunter.

Thus did each come to the other in the nature of an agreeable surprise upon that evening when they first crossed each other's path in the lodge of Father Antony upon the lonely island of the mighty lake.

As the priest, who but seldom devoted his thoughts towards any ideas of personal amusement, appeared to have really entered into the idea of fishing on the morrow with a zest quite unusual to him, not only the Indian maid but Geoffrey also at length found his attention forcibly attracted to the weighty subject of fishing tackle. For both wished to make what was usually considered but a laborious task among the Redskins into a party of pleasure for the good Father. Silver Bells presently remarked that her own contrivances, consisting but of coarse spinning baits, manufactured out of tin from the lining of provision boxes which the men brought once a year from the Hudson Bay Post, had almost entirely

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ceased to lure the great namaycush—the lake trout that would take no fly ; while her lines too were, she explained, in very bad order, having been broken over and over again. Especially was she in despair, her best emmiquan (spoon bait) having been carried off but recently by a monster of unknown dimensions.

“ I fear, my Father,” she said at length, “ that if you have but to depend upon Silver Bells to-morrow you will get but little sport. She can show you where the fish are for sure—but how to catch them no, unless it be some wall-eyed pike or whitefish. But,” she glanced coyly up at Geoffrey, “ Kennaput—perhaps Ready Rifle can help us ? They say that he can do anything—and,” she added, with a bright little smile, “ I believe them.”

Had there been such a thing as coquetry in the young girl's nature it might have been almost considered a smile of coquetry with which Silver Bells so trustingly expressed her faith in the hunter. At all events, it withdrew his thoughts from the inward contemplation of the attributes and qualities of the maid who smiled upon him to the outward consideration of the matter in hand.

“ I think I can help you, Silver Bells. I have, as it happens, fishing tackle for everybody and of the best, such as you probably have never seen in your life. The Americans whom Joe Wilson and I took up the River Nepigon on our last trip were rich people ; moreover, they were wasteful people. Although they had come out into the woods nominally for sport, it was really merely as a summer holiday that they had wandered so far from the great cities of the States to Port Arthur, where we found them. As they said themselves, although provided with a quantity of fishing tackle, they had merely come out to have ‘ a high old time of it,’ and when they were paying us off on the steamer, as we said good-bye, they insisted upon giving away to Wilson and myself all their rods and tackle ; they would not be bothered, they said, to take the things back with them. If they ever came again, which they doubted, they guessed that they

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could buy more. As, having been drinking a bit, they seemed disposed to throw the things over the side of the steamer into Lake Superior rather than be troubled with looking after them on their journey home, we took the lot. Wilson did not know what to do with them, as he is going East again at once, so I brought them on here, thinking that they would be sure to come in useful, especially as I lost my own things in an accident, when I nearly got drowned last year in the Peribonca River. I have them tied up to my tent poles; they are inside the canvas of my little tent which is with other stores lying under my canoe. The canoe is turned upside down so that the huskies cannot tear the things to pieces. Shall we go and get them?"

"Unishishin, good! There, Father, did I not say that Ready Rifle would help us? Shall we go?"

"Yes, my daughter, by all means, and you were right to expect good things of Ready Rifle. We will help him to get them and examine them by the light of the camp-fire, and then you shall read a chapter of the Holy Gospels to us."

"Willingly, my Father—but oh! let us fetch these wonderful things which are, Ready Rifle says, such as Silver Bells has never seen. Indeed, she has seen so little!"

With the impetuosity of a child, her bells jingling as she ran, Silver Bells flew on before and—anxious to please—already had the light birch bark craft right side up and the knots binding the canvas of the tent half untied before Geoffrey and Father Antony joined her on the strand.

It being now the middle of September the nights were already a little frosty. In addition to several other fires, dotted about here and there at various distances, a magnificent camp-fire of huge logs blazed in front of Father Antony's teepee, which was the post of honour in the camp.

Here, by the firelight, while the huge wolf-like dogs sat in a circle at a distance from the blaze, Silver Bells

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for the first time in her life was initiated into the mysteries of the white man's style of fishing apparatus.

When the slender, tapering rods were taken from their cases and jointed together, when the reels, fine lines, light gut minnow traces, and artificial minnows, each armed with various triangle hooks, were first displayed to her view, her delight at viewing these new and highly varnished products of civilisation was only equalled by her incredulity on the subject of their ever being of any use for catching fish.

"Wah! wah! Ready Rifle," she exclaimed with a rippling laugh, "those light lines and pretty little fish may perhaps catch the smallest speckled trout down below in the River Nepigon, but our great namaycush! This is how they pull — Kintowabboma weh? Do you see this? With both hands the Indian maiden endeavoured suddenly to snap an oiled silk salmon line on one of the reels. Although it looked so thin, she only cut her hands for her pains. Which made her make a grimace!

Geoffrey and the priest laughed at her. The former now handed her a new minnow trace of single gut; it looked very fine indeed to her.

"See here, Silver Bells; this you can break if you like, with a good hard pull, now that it is dry, but wet it, and to-morrow the Padre will hold the biggest fish with it that swims in Lake Nepigon—if he plays it properly that is."

"Why should not you hold the largest fish yourself, Ready Rifle, and show him and me the way?" she asked simply. "I think my Father knows nothing about fishing, and Silver Bells, now that she has seen these things, is sure that she has got to learn everything over again. The daughter of the Crees will paddle your canoe for you and you shall teach her."

"No, Silver Bells, you shall paddle Father Antony and help him. Here, I see Kichiamik, whom I know. I will ask him to paddle my canoe for me while I fish. I will teach you another time."

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"Unishishin," said Silver Bells submissively, but she looked a little disappointed.

And now all the Indians in the camp came up. Helped by the squaws, they had been suspending strips of moose meat on a frame work over great fires to dry them. It was now that Geoffrey had indeed to give explanations, which were met with by far more plainly expressed incredulity by the braves than by Silver Bells. The gut traces especially puzzled the braves. For, accustomed as they were to fish either with nets or with a coarse hard line which would tow in a codfish, they could not believe or understand at first that skill may be more successful than brute force. "Why," they said, "those clear thin lines of transparent stuff would not hold a makarkeh—a croaking frog."

At length Geoffrey addressed them all. "Listen, oh, Kichipinné and Crested Crane. Listen, oh, my brothers, Big Beaver and Soaring Swan. It was but now that the maiden, Silver Bells, made known to Father Antony and myself that no longer does she find of any use, for the taking of the various kikun of these waters, the quask wé pitcheganak—the fish hooks of the Crees. A miserable ugans (doré) perchance, or a greedy kinushé (pike) she still may capture with the offal of the camp, or with that very makarkeh of which you spoke just now. But the mighty Namacush no longer can she lure to her canoe. Far too well do they know her baits, so often have they seen them. Now, when ye find Amik—the beaver, Washisk—the muskrat, and Wagush—the wily fox, Adjitumo—the squirrel, ay, even Wabus—the timid rabbit, growing too cunning for one kind of trap or snare, what do ye do, my brethren?"

"Ugh!—change them," grunted Kichipinné.

"Even so, Kichipinné, change them for something finer, and less easy to be perceived and the beasts are captured! So, too, will we approach the salmon trout of the lake, Namacush, the old wary one of the waters, with something that he knoweth not for all his cunning.

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And to-morrow the good Father and I will, with the maid and Big Beaver, bring him to an untimely end. Ye shall see, oh, my brethren." And Geoffrey laughed as he concluded his exordium.

"Wah! wah! it is Ready Rifle; he knows all! I will go with him; we shall see," laughed out Big Beaver.

"Yes, yes, it is Ready Rifle; he knows what he talks about," repeated Kichipinné, good humouredly. "I am glad that he has come. We shall want fish to freeze for the winter for food for ourselves and our dogs, for even Attikamek—the whitefish, this year can no longer be captured in nets. He will teach Silver Bells how to catch us namacush, and then he will come hunting with us and we shall have much game. Sagaswadda! let us have a smoke."

After this talk by the camp-fire, Father Antony and Geoffrey retired once more to the wigwam. Silver Bells, accompanying them, read aloud to them in her musical tones a chapter of the Gospels from the Indian Bible, which the priest had made. In this the Holy Scriptures were inscribed in little triangles, squares, circles and dots, the ancient symbolical writing of the Indians.

And how next day they went a-fishing, and how, to the delight of Silver Bells, many huge namacush were captured on the fine lines—fish so large, that by no means could they be drawn into the canoes save by the teeth of Big Beaver, who, when the thirty and forty pounders were wearied out, seized them by the tails with his teeth in the Indian manner, was it not all written down in the annals, which the good Father Antony left behind him, when he departed for the happy hunting grounds of Manitou, the great spirit of white man and Redskin alike?

CHAPTER XV

AN UNEXPECTED INTERRUPTION

AFTER the return of the hunters from the shooting expedition, which had merely been a short one, there were a few days of comparative idleness upon the island, the chief occupation, the drying of as much meat as was not consumed, being left to the women. The men in the meantime were overhauling their traps for the fall and winter trapping, a not very arduous task. As, however, in spite of all the teachings of Father Antony, the Indians were always most wasteful in the matter of meat, whenever there was any in camp, it was found that the amount which remained and dried after a week's idleness was entirely inadequate to meet the coming hard weather. Further expeditions therefore became necessary, while the Indians were waiting for the lake to freeze over, when they intended to move themselves and all their belongings, by dog sleigh, to a point a great many miles to the northward. Upon the first of these Geoffrey went, with Kichipinné, Big Beaver and Soaring Swan, when again it was to his rifle that most of the game fell victim. Although, as already stated, game was scarce near the island owing to the recent forest fires, yet, within a day's journey to the north-west, the tracks of two moose had been fallen in with. After long and very careful tracking the animals, which were unusually shy and alert, were almost come up with in a little wood of dwarf poplar when, the weather being very calm and still, and therefore unfavourable, the moose were both alarmed by a stick breaking under the moccasined foot of Kichipinné.

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As the two magnificent creatures made off towards some open muskeg swamp, beyond which there was no cover for many miles, the Cree chief, in despair, gave them up for lost. He had not, however, reckoned with the wonderful shooting powers of Geoffrey with his Express rifle. Even as the huge beasts were crashing away at full speed, through the standing timber and over the fallen logs, Digby stopped one of them, when almost invisible among the trees, by a lucky shot in the neck. Then, bounding instantly forward over the fallen logs, with an agility equal to that of the cumbrous-looking moose themselves, he reached the edge of the covert to see the other magnificent animal ploughing its way at full speed through the swamp. This offered no impediment to a creature of its enormous strength, although a horse or a cow would have been hopelessly bogged upon breaking through the thin frozen crust.

The quarry seemed lost for ever when, at a distance of full four hundred yards, it stopped momentarily and turned to look back for its fallen companion which had happened to be a cow. As the great bull, full nineteen hands high, paused thus for a second, with its magnificent antlers reared high towards heaven, the young hunter took his opportunity, a very poor one indeed at that distance at an animal endways on. Without stopping to adjust his sights, Geoffrey hurriedly chanced a shot at the bull's chest, aiming higher to allow for the increased range. With a smack like a rifle-ball striking a target, the bullet smote the moose fair in the middle of the chest. For a second the mighty beast stood, then turned to fly. For three or four gigantic strides it proceeds, as if unhurt, then down it comes upon its knees! Again it rises, stumbles on a few paces more, then falls, with a crash and a bellow, never to rise again.

Well indeed that day had Geoffrey Digby earned his Indian title of Ready Rifle!

The war whoops of delight which came from the hoarse throat of the Cree chief were so tremendous that they were heard by Big Beaver and Soaring Swan, a

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mile and a half away. It took several journeys backwards and forwards of all the men and some of the women, with all the canoes in camp, to bring in the meat of those two gigantic creatures. Nor were the voyages unaccompanied with considerable danger. On account of the rough weather, they had to be accomplished by coasting; the last part, where a mile or two of open lake had to be traversed, being in particular most risky. All of the meat, however, was brought in in safety, and if Ready Rifle had been a hero before, he was doubly so in the little camp upon the island after these two splendid shots.

Big Beaver and Soaring Swan had also killed a brown bear, which they had shot while clawing away the soft under layers of bark of a silver birch. This the poor brute was doing preparatory to making a lining with the fibre for the hole in which it intended to hibernate. But Bruin slept his last long sleep without having any occasion to use those warm trimmings for his intended nest.

The subsequent expeditions were conducted entirely upon the eastern bank of the lake to avoid having to cross the open water, the eastern shore being not more than half a mile from the island. As, however, there had been more of the forest burned away upon that side, the Indians had to remain longer away. Moreover, Geoffrey did not accompany them but, at Father Antony's request, remained at the camp to keep him company. He now commenced taking Silver Bells out with him daily duck shooting, for enormous numbers of ducks and geese were frequently flying southwards along the lake, upon which they alighted to rest before proceeding on their long journey to the distant marshes of Florida.

Silver Bells was never so happy as during these duck shooting operations, in which she proved of great assistance. For, herself almost entirely concealed by spruce boughs at the stern of the canoe, as was Geoffrey at the bow, she would by an occasional silent stroke of the paddle

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urge the light craft, which was made as much as possible to resemble a floating fir tree, gradually nearer a flock of fat and delicious fall ducks resting on the water. Then two shots from Geoffrey, one at the birds on the water, one at the flock as it rose, would secure a goodly number of victims. During the pursuit of the cripples, all disguise being abandoned, both occupants of the little craft would be able to warm their freezing limbs by paddling vigorously after the swimmers. As many of these would dive just as they were being reached and before they could be finished off by another shot, this pursuit of the wounded ducks was often exciting work. This sport, however, became more and more difficult to pursue as the ice began to form round the shores of the lake, although near the island there was generally one broken piece of water from which the canoes could be launched. At length one morning, although none but a slight sprinkling of snow had as yet fallen, those upon the island woke up to find the entire surface of the lake frozen over. Nothing but ice was to be seen so far as the eye could reach. The Indians were all away at this period and would have to wait to return until the ice was strong enough to bear. This did not, however, take long, for, two mornings later, even the thunderous roarings of the Virgin Falls, by which the Nepigon River empties itself out of the lake, had ceased to be heard in the distance, for the cataract had become muffled by its coating of ice.

The land of Canada was now in the grip of winter; not that, however, the coldest weather had by any means yet arrived. Upon that day Kichipinné and the other hunters returned. They had been fairly successful upon their trip, but the chief arrived with a very long face. For he had learned, from some other Indians whom he had met, news which considerably disconcerted his plans. This was that already, thus early, large bands of great timber wolves had commenced to come southwards from the direction of the Albany River and were chasing away the herds of migratory caribou. Against these he had

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intended that he and his tribesmen should wage war, taking advantage of the deep snow to track them down. Kichipinné was not afraid of the great grey wolves himself, not in the least. In fact, there was nothing the fierce old Redskin delighted in more than the prospect of a good tussle with them when properly prepared for their appearance. He now looked forward to shooting or poisoning a good many of them during the winter. But to move his wife, and the wives of the other Indians and the young people up to the very country which they were known to be infesting, that was another matter entirely. A council of war was held accordingly in Father Antony's teepee. The result of this, when many pipes had been smoked, was that it was resolved to divide the forces. It was determined that, as there was an abundance of wood already cut for fuel upon the island, and quantities more of the burnt timber logs lying upon the mainland only half a mile away, which could easily be dragged across the ice by some of the huskey dogs, that it could not be wise for the whole of the party to move to a country where it would be necessary to collect all fuel in the constant danger of being surprised by wolves. Father Antony's advice, which was always consulted and usually listened to, was as follows:—

“Listen to my words, oh, Kichipinné, for this is my counsel. Leave here with us Big Beaver, than whom no braver and more stalwart a brave exists in the ranks of the Crees. I will ask our friend Ready Rifle also to give up his intention of wintering to the north of the lake, and to remain here to protect us. He and Big Beaver, with such assistance as the women and boys can give, can make a barricade of logs round our camp, through which no wolves coming across the ice can penetrate. We will make but one entrance, and that can be barricaded at dark. When this is finished, Big Beaver and Ready Rifle together can pursue trapping operations. They can set traps for mink, ermine, marten and lynx within such distances from camp upon the

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shores of the Nepigon River as they can easily reach upon their snowshoes, always returning hither before nightfall. There is, you know, oh, Kichipinné, much fur to be trapped in this manner along the banks of the river, even if it be not nearly so considerable as that in the country further north, whither we were all to have gone. But in this way, especially if the two boys be armed with guns, which ye have to spare, we can protect ourselves here, and yet need not Ready Rifle and Big Beaver entirely lose their time. In the spring, when the time comes to hand in the bundles of furs to the Hudson Bay Post, all can share and share alike as if all had been together. I have spoken ! Is this fair ? Are my words good ? ”

“Wah ! wah ! the Father’s words are always good,” replied Big Partridge, “and this is sound counsel. As the Father says, so it shall be done. The Father himself, although not so strong as of yore, can use a rifle right well. The lads can shoot well also. They shall have guns. If Big Beaver and Ready Rifle are willing, they shall stay, and if the mahinganak (the great grey wolves) should come, I pity those that Ready Rifle but so much as sees out of the corner of his eye ! ”

“As for us, we shall be four men always armed. We shall be safe, and will kill many wolves and get much fur, even if the caribou have been driven away. In the spring, just before the breaking of the ice, ye can come up and join us at The Point. We will leave you enough dogs for the sleighs. If they be not enough to bring all the camp things, anything not wanted can be left here. The red man, unless he be a cursed Sioux or a Black-foot, does not steal. Not one of our brethren of the Ojibboways, nor any of the half-breeds dwelling down the river, would move so much as a tent pole, no, nor a paddle of a canoe, unless to borrow it to bring back again. Have I spoken true words, oh ! my Father ? ”

“You have spoken the truth, oh, Kichipinné ! Have not I myself seen an axe lying by the side of a trail ? Ay, and a man’s watch lying by that axe, week after week, moon after moon, until the axe was rusted away, and the

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works of the watch fell to pieces. Yet, save to take them up and examine them, no Indian, no half-breed in all this territory, and hundreds passed along that trail, touched that axe or watch. No, my son, the Indians here are not thieves. They could," the good Father could not here restrain a smile—"they could *almost* be trusted to leave a bottle of whisky lying on a trail."

This sally was too much for the gravity of all present at the council of war. There was a general guttural laugh, which increased as Crested Crane remarked drily,—

"Whisky is not a good thing to be lying about, my Father ; it would be a pity to leave it, lest it should lead anybody into mischief!"

"I wish I had the whisky now," chimed in Eagle Plumes. "I could drink a bottle, but it is hard to get fire-water. The accursed Government puts a fine of three hundred dollars upon anyone selling spirits to the red man, although we would give many good beaver skins."

"The Government is careful of your health, and there the Government is right, Eagle Plumes ; but since you had such good drinks in days gone by you can do all the better without the fire-water now."

Eagle Plumes made a grimace at this remark of Father Antony's which, for want of the longed for fire-water, was all he had to swallow.

Kichipinné here once more addressed the assembly. "My brethren, Ready Rifle and Big Beaver, how is it to be? Will you stay here and guard the lodges with the Father and the squaws? It shall be share and share alike of the furs if ye will stay. Ye may perchance be none too many rifles here ; there will be no honour lost to him who remains."

"I will stay," said Big Beaver, promptly. Kichiamik would as lief stay as go, Kichipinné. He is too old and too ugly now to think of losing honour by staying with a priest and squaws. There was a time though," he added excitedly, "when upon the trail of the accursed

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Sioux, that the Great Spirit himself would not have—”

“Big Beaver,” interrupted Father Antony, severely, “are you not a Christian?”

“Yes, my Father,” replied the Redskin, “Big Beaver is now a Christian, but my Father will remember that he was not always a Christian—now he is a Christian, Kichiamik behaves as a Christian.”

“And then I can, alas! remember some other little traits in your character, Kichiamik, which are best forgotten even by yourself. So let us not talk of old times, it is settled that you stay. Now what about Ready Rifle? He has given no answer.”

Everyone present looked at Geoffrey, who looked thoughtful and perplexed. He sat, making no sign. Presently he turned towards Kichipinné, with a doubt very clearly marked upon his usually decided features.

“Listen, Kichipinné, and listen, oh, braves of the Crees!” He had got no further than this when a sudden interruption from an unexpected quarter astonished all those assembled in the lodge.

“I say that Ready Rifle ought not to stay in the lodge! It may not be well for my sister, Silver Bells, that he should stay.”

Soaring Swan was the speaker. A thunderbolt falling into the teepee could not have created more consternation than this unexpected outburst upon those assembled in council.

His face flushing red with indignation, Geoffrey bounded to his feet, while Kichipinné—indeed every soul present—turned almost savagely upon the speaker.

Kichipinné spoke furiously. “Son, beware! Would Soaring Swan insult our brother, Ready Rifle? Would you, you dog, speak ill of your sister’s honour?”

“I say,” repeated Soaring Swan, sulkily, “what I have said. It may not be well for my sister, Silver Bells, that Ready Rifle should stay. But I have said no word against the guest within our lodges. I have not spoken

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ill of my sister's honour and, Christian that I am, would slay the man that dared to do so."

A silence fell upon all as Father Antony rose to his feet and with grave dignity confronted Soaring Swan.

CHAPTER XVI

DRIFTING

ONE evening a week or two earlier, before the deciduous tamracs had lost their spindles, and when the leaves of the dwarf poplars and maples had assumed their beautiful autumnal tints, there could have been no prettier scene than that which fell upon the eyes of the hunter, Ready Rifle, and the Indian maiden, Silver Bells, as they turned the bow of the canoe homewards from one of their wild-fowling expeditions.

The glimpse of the island nestling on the lake, with the shining bark of the occasional silver birches glittering across the water, and flashing out between the dark green of the spruces, was typically Canadian. It breathed of the backwoods and the Red Indian, the smoke of whose fires curled lazily up through the trees, whose cover made but dimly discernible a wigwam here and there.

Everything was primeval, the huskey dogs and overturned canoes lying on the distant strand presenting just such a picture as must have existed in the backwoods a thousand years ago—ay, and thousands of years before that. And yet, as Geoffrey gazed upon it all, he was vaguely contrasting it with the oaks in the park at Thornham.

He was entranced with the scene and silent as, seated with his feet crossed in the usual way when paddling, he slowly propelled the bark homewards just as the shades of night began to fall.

The bow of the canoe was piled up with ducks or many kinds. Green-necked mallards and red-headed

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pochards lay in a heterogeneous mass, piled up upon brown fall ducks, widgeon, blue-winged teal, and mergansers. To crown the spoils, two splendid wild geese lay upon the top of the heap.

Reclining between the results of the day's hunt and Geoffrey was Silver Bells. She was seated upon a deer skin upon the bottom of the canoe, her back rested against the midship thwart, while so close was she to Geoffrey, as she faced him, that her slender little feet were disposed one upon either side of his own moccasined ankles.

Very trusting and tender was the glance with which, for a long while, the Indian girl looked at the hunter in silence. There was a more dewy moisture than usual swimming in her glorious dark eyes as she at length addressed her companion, speaking almost timorously.

"Ready Rifle, your thoughts are many miles away across the great water. You are thinking of your home; you would perchance leave us?"

Geoffrey was startled, he gave a swift and strong stroke with the paddle, which sent the water swirling away in eddying circles astern, then, as the birch bark canoe bounded forward in obedience to the stroke, he laid the good ash paddle across his knees and regarded Silver Bells with a smile. "In a measure you are right, Silver Bells, in a sense you are wrong. I was thinking of my home across the great dark water, for I was seeing in my mind's eye the foliage of the carefully-planted oaks that surround its neatly-trimmed walks and elegantly laid out approaches, and thinking how different all was here before my eyes, where naught but the seal of Nature herself is set upon that which we behold. However, I prefer the backwoods, Silver Bells. I have made my life among them, I have become a part of them, even as you are yourself. No, I do not want to leave you—or them." Silver Bells smiled, and a sigh of relief escaped from her parted lips as she replied,—

"Oh! Silver Bells is glad, her heart rejoices, Ready Rifle. Nevertheless, she knows that you are not the

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same child of the forest as she is herself, nor are you the same as the half-breeds nor even as the other white hunters of whom she has heard. Father Antony knows, all the Indians know, that Ready Rifle is a great chief among his own people. They know too that he led many of the pale-faces in battle against the Indians who fought under Riel at Duck Lake, and"—her face fell—"how can she help fearing that Ready Rifle will some day return where he will be a chief once more, where he is beloved, among the pale-faces. Yes, the day will come when he will surely leave us. Oh! what shall we do then?"

The Indian girl put up her hands before her face as if to conceal the dreadful picture of solitude that she anticipated. Indeed, as Geoffrey gazed a moment in astonishment, he saw that it was to conceal something more than a picture, for he discerned a pearly tear rolling down between the shapely fingers.

Touched and moved, the young man slipped down from the thwart, thus also seating himself upon the bottom of the canoe.

"Silver Bells!" he said softly, as with one hand he strove to uncover her face, but there was no answer—the young girl's head remained lowered.

The canoe was drifting now, and the paddle lying unused against the cedar ribs upon which the layers of tough birch bark were sewn. Geoffrey, with both hands, gently but firmly withdrew her hands from before the face of the Indian maid. She was close to him now—her lissom figure was against the mighty expanse of his chest as he raised that oval face and looked into those swimming eyes. His voice was agitated as he spoke.

"Silver Bells! wherefore do you weep? Why should it matter so much if I did leave you? What am I that you should think me worth a tear? Have you not your father Kichipinné? your brother Soaring Swan?"

Instantly Silver Bells changed her tears for a laugh, a

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laugh which was both both genuine and unexpected—yet it was ironical.

“And you, Ready Rifle, have you not a father and a mother? But — if your thoughts fly homewards across the black water—is there not, perchance, someone else whom you love more than either? Tell Silver Bells that? Answer, I pray, Ready Rifle.”

The laugh died away again upon her lips, the hands, which were still retained within his, tightened into a nervous grip within his palms as Silver Bells gazed deep into the blue eyes so near her own. Vainly she searched for a reply there, since none came from the hunter's lips.

“Has the heart of Silver Bells told her the truth?” The words were now murmured in a tremulous whisper. “There is doubtless some chief's daughter among the pale-faces whom you have but left for a while. For her it is you shoot the bear, Ready Rifle; for her you trap the mink, the beaver, and the otter; for her you will soon have gained enough fur and sold it at the Hudson Bay Post. You will go back and take your finest furs with you, those which were too valuable to sell at the Post and which you have hidden in some cache. You will land from your iskuti-cheemun, your fire canoe, upon the distant shore of the great water.

“The daughter of the Crees can see you land there! Upon your back you will take a pack, a great roll—rich furs of silver fox and black fox and of finest beaver skins.

“And while the maid of the pale-faces, who sees Ready Rifle coming, will hide tremblingly within the lodge and pretend not to see, you will meet the chief, her father, at the door of the lodge. Then, laying your rifle upon one side, you will place the furs before him, saying, ‘See, oh, chief! what Ready Rifle has brought you—silver fox and black fox, and furs of finest beaver skin!’ And he, after he has looked them all over, examining them one by one to see that they are good, will say, ‘It is well, Ready Rifle! I am glad to see you;

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you had good hunting there and kept your word—now you may seek the maiden within.’

“And then, Ready Rifle, you will pass in to that maid of the pale-faces, and tell her that you have come back to bear her away to your own lodge, which is bigger than any that she has yet seen, yes, even bigger than the house of Denis Deschamps in the Village du Sacré Cœur. Then she will bow before you and call you her lord and chief.

“Then the daughter of the white chief will tell how sad her heart has been with waiting, but now that it sings with joy within her bosom, since Ready Rifle has returned from his long hunting and has appeased the chief, her father, with rich furs. But,” here Silver Bells scarcely spoke above a whisper, “there is one thing that neither the white chief nor the daughter of the pale-faces shall have, and that, Ready Rifle, is the skin of the great wapiti that you gave to the Indian maid. No white woman shall have that for her lodge, for Silver Bells will require it—to be buried in. For Silver Bells will die. That is all. She has spoken!” She looked in his face full a moment with a forlorn expression, then covered her face with her hands once more.

As, with all this imagery of the untutored Indian, Silver Bells set forth in her simple language this graphic description of things as she imagined them to be, Geoffrey Digby felt his heart going out more and more towards her. The maiden’s innocent heart he had already guessed, although unwillingly, to have been laid at his feet. Nevertheless, notwithstanding that he had felt the too evident affection of the maid gradually permeating his moral being, he had realised but too plainly the gulf that separated him, a child of civilisation, from this child of the woods, this lovely offspring of a line of Redskins.

Thus, although any recollection of the love of another had latterly brought no lingering tenderness with it, indeed nought save the resentment of a bitter wrong, he

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had crushed back by force the rising love which he had gradually conceived for little Silver Bells.

Prudence and forethought, for the girl's sake and future position as much as for his own, had restrained him from letting himself go when, mere child of Nature as she was, he had commenced to recognise his affinity in this Indian maiden.

Geoffrey, the soul of honour, would not for worlds have taken advantage of the trust which she so evidently placed in him, the admiration which Silver Bells with her great dark eyes so clearly expressed.

He thrust back from him, as a venomous snake, all idea of any union with the girl which was not an honourable one, the most distant thought of aught which might bring her name into disgrace.

Seeing the laxity which has often existed among the Redskins, whereby irregular unions with white men have been permitted and given rise to a large half-breed population, most white men living in the backwoods would never have dreamed of treating with such chivalrous respect one whom, however beautiful, they would have characterised as—only a squaw.

Just as if a squaw were a being with no soul, no honour to be considered !

The very word squaw, often uttered by white men almost as a term of reproach for a woman of the Redskins, is indeed merely the white man's harsh and unmusical corruption of the musical Indian word *iquah*, a word in which the vowels are pronounced softly, with an Italian pronunciation.

Squaw or no squaw, Geoffrey recognised in Silver Bells a creature with a soul. It might, however, be that, although brought up as a Christian, the ardent outpourings of a heart so closely akin to Nature might induce the child to travel too closely upon Nature's lines. Should she be brought under the spell of temptation, the impulses of love might impel the maid to wildly grasp at that which, save by following Nature's laws, seemed to be entirely beyond her reach. Geoffrey, who had lived

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all his life among Nature, saw and understood this child better than she understood herself. He read her like a book, and knew that he had but to hold up his little finger—but to express his faintest desire—and say “Come !” for Silver Bells to follow him to the end of the earth, regardless of consequences.

Knowing this so well, Geoffrey — backwoodsman, trapper, as he had become—remembered only his youthful training as an honourable gentleman, and had never uttered that fateful “Come.” Nevertheless, while determined never to do the maiden any wrong, neither had he, until this moment in the canoe, allowed the idea of marriage with the daughter of the Redskins to enter his head. He had thought of his father, his mother, his sister—he had even thought of Geraldine McGeorge. How could he, one of a British county family, present to any one of them at home as his wife a full-blooded Indian girl of the tribe of Crees ?

Now, however, the whole import of the serious nature of the situation burst upon him like a thunder-clap.

Silver Bells loved him—loved him devotedly ! If she could not marry him she would be utterly miserable, her young life would be wasted—spoiled.

He loved Silver Bells—she had burst into his heart, causing its chords to vibrate with a hitherto unknown harmony. That heart, seared so long with the recollection of the worthless affection of a calculating daughter of civilisation, was touched to the core by the trusting simplicity with which the child of the forest generously gave him her love. In return all the tenderness of his soul flowed out towards her ; his determination was made—he would give up everything else in life !

He would marry her ! yes, marry her, and renouncing civilisation, live and die in the backwoods, with Silver Bells and her kinsmen the Indians.

If they had children, they, being half-breeds, also should be brought up as backwoodsmen and never be taught of the inheritance of an English gentleman which

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their white father had resigned. To them, as to their mother, he would be Ready Rifle, a hunter, nothing more.

Having made up his mind upon these points, even while the Indian maiden was speaking, no sooner had she ceased than Geoffrey repossessed himself of her little hands, which she had withdrawn.

"Silver Bells," he said, looking straight into the depths of her eyes, "Silver Bells, there is no white chief's daughter, there is no maid of the pale-faces to call me lord and chief. I love you, Silver Bells, you alone are all that I desire. You alone shall share my lodge."

A gasp of joy, a cry of delighted surprise came from the lovely lips.

"Ready Rifle! you love Silver Bells! oh!"—she paused, and a gathering cloud passed rapidly to the so recently illumined face. "Wherefore should you mock the daughter of Crees?" she asked piteously. "What has she done that Ready Rifle should make sport of her?" The look of despair upon her features wrung the white man's heart.

"Look into my eyes," said Geoffrey, steadfastly. "Do you read deceit there? Can you find aught of mockery in the face of the man who repeats that life for him henceforth means life with Silver Bells?"

As the maiden met his gaze, gradually it dawned upon her that here was no deceit; that noble, truthful glance indeed revealed the wonderful secret, she was beloved of the man to whom she had given her soul, asking for no return, expecting nothing. "There is no deceit," she murmured at length, "for Ready Rifle has that in his face which brings life to Silver Bells."

As the young hunter protectively encircled the Indian maiden with his arms, Silver Bells hid her joy-illumined countenance modestly upon his heart.

Night fell upon this happiness and meanwhile the canoe was drifting. It had drifted almost to the brink of the Virgin Falls before the pair awoke to a sense of their danger. Then, each taking a paddle, by strenuous

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exertion and dexterous canoe work, they extricated themselves from their dangerous position in the quiet but heavy current which drained the mighty lake.

They landed upon the rocky shore and portaged the canoe to a place of safety in the stiller waters. Nevertheless, it was long after the shades of night had overspread lake and forest alike that the pair, happy, and trusting in each other's love, regained their island home.

CHAPTER XVII

THE PRIEST'S COUNSEL

STRAIGHTFORWARD as he was by nature, Geoffrey's disposition was nevertheless not of that expansive order that sees the necessity of making communications about one's own affairs unasked. It was, therefore, after he had taken the perilous leap in one manner, and nearly taken it also in another, with Silver Bells, several evenings ere the subject was mentioned at all between him and his good friend, the priest. And then it came upon the tapis owing to a remark that Father Antony made himself.

Geoffrey had returned to the island again one evening considerably after nightfall and, as he entered the teepee, the Father heard without the unmistakable sound of the jingling of bells, although the moccasined feet of their wearer passed silently enough over the frozen ground.

The worthy man, who was reading over some of his manuscripts by the light of a candle, fixed by a strip of birch bark in a cleft stick, alongside the couch upon which his buffalo-skin robes were spread, looked up with rather an anxious expression as the hunter, entering the teepee, carefully fastened the strip of caribou hide which closed the entrance.

"Well, Mr Digby, so here you are, and I am glad to see you back ; but is it not rather late for you to be out hunting this cold weather ? Have you been flight-shooting by moonlight ? "

"I have not been shooting at all for the last hour and a half," replied Digby, as he wiped the barrels of his

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gun. "There is not enough moon for flight-shooting, I could not see to hit a haystack if I tried, let alone a duck."

Father Antony laid down his manuscript and, after a pause of visible hesitation, said,—

"Then, my dear Mr Digby, will you pardon me if I inquire what you have been doing out on the lake so late with Silver Bells? You must both have been half frozen."

"I have been making love to Silver Bells, there was no chance of our getting frozen," answered Geoffrey, with a quiet smile, as he looked the priest fair in the face.

"Then," said the priest, in agitated tones, "it is as I feared; but Heavens! do you not see the danger to the girl's immortal soul, the danger, too, to the maiden's temporal welfare in the course you are pursuing? Think of the vengeance that you may bring down upon the head of Silver Bells, think also of the vengeance that you may bring down upon your own head from these Indians, her relations. They have, I fear, not yet learned sufficient of the tenets of Christianity not to resent, in bloodthirsty fashion, any wrong done to the Chief's young daughter. Pause, I pray of you, my good Mr Digby, in this career of love-making. Pause, I implore you, and leave us ere it be too late—if, which Heaven forefend! it be not indeed too late already."

Digby came over to the priest, who had risen from his couch.

"Father Antony, I thought that you knew me better. Let me in turn beg of you to pause; your suspicions are unworthy of myself, unworthy of Silver Bells. More than that, they are unworthy of yourself." He held out his hand. "I assure you that you can take this hand as that of an honest man. I intend to marry Silver Bells. I have said!" he concluded, in the vigorous phraseology of the Indians.

Father Antony mechanically took the hand stretched

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out to him, but the astonishment which he experienced was too great to allow him to display much enthusiasm as he returned its pressure. Nor can it be said that any of the expected expression of relief came over his face. On the contrary, if before he had seemed troubled, now an absolute look of consternation overspread his features. The teachings of the man of the world, of the Jesuit, were far more apparent than the teachings of the Scriptures in his reply.

"Marry Silver Bells ! you marry Silver Bells ! Good Heaven ! Mr Digby, have you lost your senses ? Do you want to ruin yourself for life ? With a spouse taken from among the Crees, what sort of a figure will you ever be able to present in any society again ?"

Geoffrey laughed cheerfully. "Just now, I think, Father Antony, it was the girl whom you were afraid that I should ruin. Now it seems that all your fears are for my unworthy self. But set your mind at rest, for what do I care for Society ? What does Society care for me ? As I have made my bed so I intend to lie upon it. Five years ago I left Society and took to the woods, and henceforward I intend my bed to be laid beside that of Silver Bells among the lodges of her people, the Crees ; the home of my wife will be my home also. I do not propose to take her into London drawing-rooms or to introduce her to the county society in Norfolk, for them to turn up their noses and sniff at the Indian girl or merely come over in their carriages to view, as a matter of curiosity, the daughter of the Redskins. No, my good friend, I have more sense than that. Silver Bells belongs absolutely to the woods, nothing could ever make her otherwise. I, too, belong to the backwoods. I shall marry her, and you will kindly tie the knot for me, after which, here in the backwoods I intend to remain for the rest of my natural term of existence."

"Then your intentions are all wrong, my dear young man, and as you once saved my life I pray of you earnestly to listen to my words in time and be saved by

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them. For you are about to commit suicide—moral suicide. You have duties elsewhere than here for ever among the Indians. You have a father, a mother, a family. You are the heir to a great estate. You cannot shirk your responsibilities in life like this merely for a whim. It is not right to your relations, your mother, your sister, because you are attracted by the undoubted charms of an Indian maiden—good, modest, honest maiden though she be—that you should cut yourself off from all of them for ever. I tell you, I foresee now that if you do this then will come trouble from your unwisdom. Think of the sorrow of your mother, Mr Digby! Think, I say, of the disappointment of your father, whose only son and hope you are! You have been long enough away from them as it is. The time has already come for you to return home and comfort them in their old age. I have often considered that you should do so already. May God forgive me if, in my own selfishness, because I enjoyed the charm of your society, I have not urged you strongly already to go back to your parents and to the world. Now, however, I do beg of you, most seriously, to re-consider your determination. Believe me, a time will surely come some day when you will wish to see civilisation once more. Even I, who have felt the call of God to minister to these poor people in the wilds, have frequently felt that desire and occasionally gratified it. You, my dear Mr Digby, have no such call to remain in the wilderness, and you, perhaps even more than I have done, will want at some time in your life to be among white faces again. Then when that longing comes how will you be able to gratify it? Either you must go back among the white folks alone—knowing that you are a disappointment to them all the time, with your Indian wife in the backwoods—or else—and this, judging from what I have seen from your disposition is the more likely—you will sacrifice yourself and remain with your Indian wife unwillingly.”

“But, Father!—”

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"Nay, do not stop me, I must point out to you that to follow either of these courses will be unfair to that Indian wife, for Silver Bells has sensitive nerves and will know all and feel deeply. The fairest thing of all—the only way for you to treat her, to prevent such eventualities, I say, is to leave her now before it is too late. Now, Mr Digby—I, too, have said! I feel sure that God has pointed out to you, through me, His agent, the course that you should pursue for this poor Indian child's happiness and for your own."

The priest's tones were most emphatic as he concluded this exordium—indeed, it seemed almost as if he had worked himself into a state of heat. For he was by no means well and the least thing excited him unnecessarily. Knowing this, and, from feelings of consideration, not wishing to excite him further, without replying to Father Antony, Geoffrey sat down and commenced taking the lock of his gun to pieces—examining the springs critically in silence, as if that was all he had to think about in the world.

This silence, however, did not suit the worthy Padre, who, with two bright hectic flushes on his cheeks, was fuming inwardly, he therefore returned to the charge.

"Mr Digby, have you not seen the justice of my words? Are you not now yourself convinced that the truest, kindest action which you can perform for the welfare of Silver Bells is to give up this foolish idea of marrying her and, instead, to leave her in peace here among her own people?"

Geoffrey put down his gun locks and, speaking quietly and calmly, replied,—

"No, Father Antony, I regret that I cannot agree with you. I think that were I now to do so it would break her heart. I might, it is true, have gone away sooner, but now it is too late. I have told her that I will marry her—and," he uttered the words with emphasis—"marry Silver Bells I will!"

"Then," said Father Antony, with equal decision, "I regret that I can be no party to what I can only consider

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as a most terrible error—indeed, almost a crime against yourself and your family—an error which will more than probably also bring sorrow upon the head of this little Indian maiden, whom I have watched over and felt an affection for since her childhood. I cannot marry you to her. I must decline to perform the ceremony.”

“Upon what grounds will you decline, Father Antony? What sort of excuse, when I ask them for the hand of Silver Bells, can you give to Kichipinné and to his wife, Miriam, for refusing to unite us in the bonds of holy matrimony?”

“A very potent and proper one,” replied the priest, drily and casuistically. “Merely that you are a Protestant while Silver Bells is a Catholic, and that it is not according to my conscience to celebrate a mixed union between persons of different faith.”

“Under these circumstances,” replied Geoffrey, “I will change my faith and become a Catholic. Surely you cannot refuse to receive me into the Catholic Church?”

“Yes, I can refuse to do that—also, until you have properly studied the tenets of our holy religion. When you have done so, when I am indeed convinced that you are in fact a true believer, I shall not consider that it will be wrong for me to perform the ceremony of baptism. It is, however, a sacrament too holy to be administered lightly for merely worldly reasons.”

There was a silence in the teepee for a while. After which Geoffrey lifted the deer-skin flap and walked out into the night. He did not return until it was late, when Father Antony was either asleep or feigned to be so.

The result of Geoffrey’s cogitations was that there was some sense in Father Antony’s remarks; he knew, moreover, that the priest was merely acting in what he believed to be his friend’s own best interests in thus refusing to facilitate his union with the lovely child of the Redskins. However, all his objections had already been discounted by the young man in advance, in his communings with himself, therefore they came with no new weight.

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Moreover, he felt, and with justice, that the Father did not give sufficient thought to Silver Bells and to her wishes and aspirations in the matter. Geoffrey was convinced that the good priest had not the faintest idea of the wealth of love which this young being had poured out upon him, that he did not realise the probability that to leave her now would be to break her heart, crush her young life out of her.

Nevertheless, that the priest was determined he knew, but Geoffrey was determined also.

Upon the following morning, Father Antony, who had cooled down during the night, could not restrain a smile when the young hunter asked him seriously if he was prepared to give him his first instruction in the tenets of the Catholic faith.

"Willingly, my son," returned the priest, good-humouredly. But no mention was made of the name of Silver Bells, and after that day the lessons in the faith were imparted whenever there was time available for the purpose.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE WILY REDSKIN

"WILL Soaring Swan explain his words? Ready Rifle is the man who saved my life. He is my friend."

Thus spoke Father Antony.

"Ugh!" ejaculated Kichipinné, "the words of the Father are good, Ready Rifle is my friend also. He is a brave that would not steal his friend's daughter. She is safe with him, safe as the axe or the watch upon the trail. Let, therefore, Soaring Swan explain, and let him not lie!" The father looked meaningly at the son, while the other braves present ejaculated like their Chief, while frowns o'erspread the features of all. "Ugh! it is good! Ready Rifle is the friend of our lodges. Let Soaring Swan not lie!"

"I will not lie," said Soaring Swan, sullenly. "Why should the son of Kichipinné lie? I will say the words of truth in so far as I know them. They are chiefly but what the young maid, Golden Arrow, told me."

"Golden Arrow—my daughter!" interrupted Big Beaver, fiercely. "What has Golden Arrow to say of Silver Bells? What lying tales has she borne against Ready Rifle?"

"Thou knowest, oh, my father, thou knowest, oh, Kichiamik," replied Soaring Swan, "that almost since she was a papoose crying round the lodges I have borne affection for the girl, Golden Arrow. Ye know that, although now so young that it is not deemed fit that she shall wed, yet when two more summers have come and gone I hope to take her to my own teepee. Yet ever have I been careful to do with Golden Arrow

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naught that is not fitting in the eyes of the braves and the squaws. Thus when, not yet a moon since, before the coming of the ice, she stole to me one night by the camp-fire and beckoned me behind the lodges, I was angered when I heard her request, which was that Soaring Swan should at that late hour take Golden Arrow in his canoe upon the lake. I chid Golden Arrow. Soaring Swan told her that her wish was not seemly in a maiden of the Crees of her tender years. Thereupon she wept, saying foolishly, 'What is good for the daughter of the Chief is good for the daughter of Big Beaver. If Silver Bells can be out after nightfall with the white chief, Ready Rifle, why may not Golden Arrow go on the lake likewise, in his cheemun, with the brother of Silver Bells?' "

Here the Chief's son paused and glanced at Geoffrey.

He, after his first momentary excitement, had seated himself again. He was now calmly smoking, while listening to the words of Soaring Swan, as though that stately young Redskin were referring to anyone but himself. The glance which Kichipinné now also threw across the teepee at Geoffrey likewise failed to move him, although it could scarcely have been called pleasant. However, the Chief merely bade Soaring Swan continue, which he did as follows:—

"Soaring Swan asked of Golden Arrow to be careful of her words, when she replied, in the pettish manner of a maid when vexed, 'Unishishin! I suppose Ready Rifle may take Silver Bells in his cheemun, hunt all day with her the shishipak, stay out with her till even the huskey dogs are asleep, wearied with waiting for their return. Ay, kenaput, the white chief may even, at parting, take Silver Bells within his arms, may kiss her lips—that is because she is older than Golden Arrow. But Golden Arrow may not go out at night, Golden Arrow may not take kisses—not that she wants kisses from Soaring Swan!' Then she ran off weeping, and from that time the girl has not spoken to Soaring Swan."

There was an ominous silence now, while all looked

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at Geoffrey who still sat unconcernedly smoking. Big Beaver, taking his pipe from between his lips, addressed the late speaker sneeringly.

"Soaring Swan is very ready to disclose the foibles of the daughter of Kichiamik! Has he then nothing more to say about his own sister than to repeat this prattle? What about Silver Bells? Has he ascertained if the words of Golden Arrow were the words of truth?"

"They were the words of truth. I ascertained them to be true this morning. Hearing the bells tinkling, then stop suddenly behind the lodge of the Father, Soaring Swan stepped behind a tree and beheld his sister in the arms of Ready Rifle. They embraced, then each passed on a separate way. That, my Father, is why the son of Kichipinné does not think it well that Ready Rifle should stay here with Silver Bells. Wah! wah! I have spoken!" The young Indian filled a pipe and lighted it, while there was a deathly silence in the already smoke-filled teepee.

It was the silence of the calm which precedes a thunderstorm, one could feel the electricity present in the air. It was thrown off in magnetic waves from every one of those seated braves,—even from Father Antony, who also was seated and smoking.

At length, dropping his pipe, Kichipinné addressed Geoffrey. He spoke in hoarse guttural tones, which, although not loud, were blood-curdling and horrible to listen to. His words seemed to suggest a bloodthirsty screech behind them. It seemed, in the electric tension, almost as though they would terminate with a war-whoop, while an uplifted tomahawk would be buried deep into the hunter's skull.

"Are these words the words of truth, Ready Rifle? Hast thou, the man whose hand I have taken in friendship, thou the man who hast paddled with me in my canoe, bounding like a fish upon the waters, thou who hast hunted the moose with me in the muskeg, slept with me under the same blanket beneath the spruce trees in the forest, hast thou, I ask, thus traitorously

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treated the pride of our lodges, my daughter Silver Bells? Speak, white man, thou whose name hath hitherto been well spoken of beneath the waving forest pines, from the rolling waves of the St Lawrence in the east to the snowy crest of the Rocky Mountains in the west. Say, is all yet well with the daughter of Kichipinné? How is it with the maiden of the Crees? Speak, thou guest of our lodges, that I and my son Soaring Swan may swiftly take counsel together—and know what there is to do?”

Terrible indeed and fierce was the glance with which the ancient slaughterer of the Sioux accompanied these words. Geoffrey, with fearless bearing, looked at Kichipinné, at Soaring Swan, and round at the others assembled. Quietly and deliberately, before speaking, he tapped out the ashes of his pipe upon the barrel of a rifle lying by him. Then he replied in measured tones,—

“Kichipinné and braves, my brethren, the words ye have heard have been but the words of truth. Yet indeed is all well with Silver Bells, pure as the untrodden snow upon the frozen lake is the daughter of the Crees. Verily he who would harm her should pay with his life to Ready Rifle. For—hear now my words: Silver Bells hath been for some time past the affianced bride of Ready Rifle. Demand of the Father yonder! Ask of him the reason that hitherto no word hath been said unto the maid’s father nor whispered to her brethren in their lodges upon the frozen waters. Nevertheless, oh, Chief of the Crees! hear me further and know this, that although no word hath yet been spoken unto the father of Silver Bells, yet have I had ready for him a bundle of my choicest furs,—furs such as I would not sell to the Hudson Bay Post—the black fox, the silver fox and the finest beavers’ skins, to present to him when I demand his daughter. See! here is the roll, Kichipinné. I give it before all the braves present here assembled and ask you for Silver Bells, to share my lodge, to be my wife! These are my words. I have said!”

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Rising deliberately, Geoffrey took from behind him a large roll of tightly strapped-up canvas. Stepping across the floor of the wigwam, he deposited it at the feet of Kichipinné, then quietly resumed his seat.

All present smoked in silence for a while, for whatever may have been the surprise—even the anger felt by the braves assembled—it would have been a want of decorum to have spoken again hurriedly upon such a momentous occasion. Instead of speaking, the Chief of the Crees handed the bundle of furs to Crested Crane, who sat next to him, with a sign which was understood. Crested Crane unfastened the bundle and laid the opened package before Kichipinné, whose grim features relaxed and eyes glistened with delight as he saw the pile of treasures lying exposed to view. Nevertheless, it was not the giver of the furs, but Father Antony, whom he addressed, when at length he unfastened his lips.

“Will my Father tell us what he knows? Are the words of Ready Rifle to be believed? Does my Father know indeed the cause that the white chief has kept these things in his heart, that he hath had secrets with the maiden that even Kichipinné might not know? And yet”—putting out a hand, he drew an almost priceless silver fox skin towards him—“the giver of such gifts as these can surely nourish no evil in his heart. Nay,” he continued, passing the first fur to Crested Crane, drawing out a second equally valuable, and smoothing it with his hand, “nay, the heart of Ready Rifle can but be good, yet are his methods strange.” He passed the second fur along to Eagle Plumes, took another and paused to admire it. Apparently the heart of the father of Silver Bells was even still more softened by its contemplation. A smile now spread across his grim features as he continued his monologue: “Maybe the methods of Ready Rifle are but after all methods of the pale-faces unknown to the Indians—but speak, oh, my Father! what hath been the cause of his silence which he saith thou knowest?”

“It is I myself who have been the cause of his silence,

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Kichipinné," said Father Antony, "since I have told him that this marriage may not be between him and Silver Bells."

"This marriage may not be! Wherefore?" exclaimed Kichipinné, now poising a lovely black fox skin in the right hand, as he thrust the last one he had drawn from the pile across the circle to Soaring Swan opposite.

"And why may not this marriage be, my Father?" repeated Big Partridge. "Doth the white chief then not love Silver Bells? Nay, that is not possible. See the gifts he hath brought me. His love is assured. And doth not the maiden love him? She hath shown it only too plainly. It is, moreover, her duty to love him," he added, "if her father wills. I say that the marriage may be and shall be—unless—Ready Rifle hath a wife already, and," he laughed, "that Kichipinné doth not believe."

"Nay, Kichipinné, I have no wife, nor ever had one," here interrupted Geoffrey. "Moreover, I know of no earthly reason why I should not make Silver Bells my wife. We love each other. Thou wilt surely give the maiden to me."

"The marriage cannot be, I say," repeated Father Antony, impatiently. "I tell you, Kichipinné, it is wrong for this pair to be united."

"Why wrong—if the Chief of the Crees finds it right, my Father? I demand to know!" Kichipinné spoke angrily; he did not want to lose those precious furs.

Father Antony was driven into a corner. He dare not insult the assembled Indians by even hinting at the real reason, namely, that Geoffrey was, to his mind, so immeasurably superior in every respect of birth and education to the Indian girl. His only resource, therefore, was to fall back upon the casuistical reason that he had given to Geoffrey himself. Accordingly he replied, "Because the white chief and the daughter of the Crees are not of the same religion; while Silver Bells is a Catholic, Ready Rifle is a Protestant."

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"Ugh ! what is the difference ? Are they not both Christians ?"

"Yes, but there is a difference in the form of their religions, therefore until Ready Rifle hath been properly instructed in the tenets of our holy faith, which may be a matter of many moons, if indeed it can ever take place, I cannot unite them by the sacrament of marriage."

"Ugh !" said the Redskin Chief once more. "Before I was a Christian, my Father, thou didst not tell me that there were several sects of Christians, but only said there was one good Manitou for all. If, however, there be different kinds of Christians and that will prevent Ready Rifle from becoming husband to the daughter of Kichipinné, we Crees, before our conversion, were not so particular ; what then is there to prevent us going back to the religion of our fathers ? Then there can be no such difficulty. What say ye, Crested Crane and Eagle Plumes, my brethren ? What say ye, Soaring Swan and Big Beaver ? Are my words good ? Should not the children of the Crees worship in their ancient faith, and give Silver Bells to Ready Rifle, the comrade of their lodges ?"

"Wah ! wah ! unishishin ! The words of Kichipinné are good !" was the guttural reply from the throats of all the Indians assembled.

Geoffrey, listening in silence, smiled. He perfectly understood that the casuistry of the Cree Chief was more than equal to that of the Catholic priest. He understood that this was but a threat uttered to gain his point, and that the Cree did not really mean his words. Not so, however, Father Antony, he was taken in by the cunning of the savage. Fearful of losing his converts, he began to climb down.

"There is, as I have said, a way, Kichipinné, if ye will but give time. Ready Rifle is already commencing to be instructed."

"Then let the instruction proceed swiftly, oh, my Father, or before long there will be but few Christians

The Wily Redskin

in the lodges of Kichipinné. Wah! wah! I have said."

Seizing as many of the now scattered furs as he conveniently could in his arms, and motioning to his fellow-tribesmen to bring the rest, the wily Redskin beat a hasty retreat from the lodge of Father Antony.

Geoffrey, who remained behind, upon seeing the piteous expression upon the face of the priest, was unable to restrain himself. He burst into a fit of good-humoured laughter.

His point was gained—he could afford to be merry, seeing how utterly his good friend's endeavours to protect him against himself had been frustrated by the father of his beloved Silver Bells.

CHAPTER XIX

A MEAL FOR THE WHISKEY-JACKS

THE Canadian winter now set in with vigour, and yet, although the cold was intense, the clearness of the air made the weather invigorating in the extreme. While by day the bright sun illumined the rime frost hanging to the spruces and birch trees so that every sprig seemed to be encrusted with crystals or diamonds, at night there was a still more lovely display. For no sooner had night fallen than the Aurora Borealis filled the skies overhead, the Northern Lights darting and scintillating in a great arc of blue, green and red fires over the whole wide expanse of the frost-bound lake. It was wonderful and marvellous to behold, and seemed to Geoffrey and Silver Bells more than ever to reveal the eternal presence of the Great Manitou, who watches over white man and Redskin alike.

The winter programme, as discussed in the council in the priest's wigwam, was carried out. For, once the existing relations between Ready Rifle and the Indian maid were clearly understood, and had received the approval of her father, there was no reason apparent, even to the mind of Soaring Swan, why Geoffrey, as well as Big Beaver, should not remain upon the island with his betrothed, to watch over her during the winter months. Before departing for the north with his braves, Kichipinné, who was in reality delighted, for many reasons, at the prospect of obtaining such a husband for his young daughter, spoke once more and very clearly upon the subject of the projected union.

This he said should take place upon the breaking up

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of the ice in the spring, when they should all reassemble at The Point, previous to visiting the Hudson Bay Post on the Albany River to dispose of the spoils of the winter. The Cree Chief plainly intimated to Father Antony his hopes that he would not then refuse to perform the ceremony, at the same time hinting that should he not be inclined to do so other means would be resorted to. "For," said Kichipinné, "the marriages of his forefathers are still good enough for the Cree. Is Miriam less the wife of Kichipinné merely because he took her to his lodge before he ever met the good Father, when he first came across his trail as that of a wandering trapper up near Lac Dauphin? And is not the word of Ready Rifle to be relied on? Should he take Silver Bells to his teepee after the fashion of the Redskins, will not his straightforward vow to the maiden to protect her and keep her, when she vows to be his faithful squaw, be as trustworthy as though the priest had read over them some words from a book in a foreign tongue? Surely, if the words of Ready Rifle be not honest in the one case, they will not be so in the other."

Father Antony considered it not wise to argue the matter any further. He had, he felt, done his best in order to avert what he could but look upon as a calamity for Geoffrey Digby. To persist further in combating his intentions, now that they had received the approbation of the Cree Chief, seemed foolish, for it might only result in his losing his converts. Thus all the good of years of work would be thrown away by his endeavouring to help somebody who did not want to be helped at all.

The worthy priest therefore assured Kichipinné that he would celebrate the marriage at the time appointed, but, since he was unable to climb down altogether from the position that he had at first assumed, he added that he would in the meantime continue to instruct Ready Rifle in the tenets of the Catholic faith.

After the matter was thus settled to everybody's

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satisfaction, the four Indians departed. Their numbers were, however, at the last augmented by two of the women, the wives of Crested Crane and Eagle Plumes. For, after considering the matter of the amount of dry meat there was stored, and the quantity of fish that remained frozen on the island, it was evident that there would not be enough left for so many mouths during the winter. And the Chief and his braves were going to a land where moose abounded for food. Moreover, the braves going away had considered that they would want their women with them to make fires, cook, prepare the skins, build a log house for them, and perform all the duties required to assist the hunters in their work. As far as danger from wolves went, the presence of the women would, they now considered, be an advantage rather than otherwise, as a fortified house would the sooner be built with their assistance.

As Kichipinné and his party, after a rough but affectionate leave-taking, thus departed, taking a number of their huskey dogs with them, it seemed probable that enough food remained to last both men and animals on the island until the spring. Of course both Geoffrey and Big Beaver hoped at times to supplement the store with a little fresh meat in the shape of the various kinds of wood-dwelling grouse or, as they are called in Canada, partridges, from the forest adjoining the now shrunken and frozen waters of the rapid River Nepigon. Moreover, some quantity of fresh fish could be caught, by chopping holes through the thick ice with an axe and leaving a bait suspended on a strong line to a stick laid across the hole. In this way, not only occasionally the lake trout himself, but the doré or pike-perch, a fierce and ravenous fish, of which the flesh is most excellent and delicate, can often be taken in abundance. Such, however, would be the severity of the frost that the axe would be again required, upon visiting the lines, to draw up the wriggling, fighting denizens of the lake. All of these—the usual methods of supplying the means of living in

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the Canadian backwoods in winter—were resorted to whenever practicable. But the most anxious task, and that which occupied the hands and thoughts of all at first, was the collecting of quantities of fuel, the gathering in of logs and building a stockade to form a solid enclosure around the remaining wigwams.

This proved no light work, nor was it by any means a warm occupation, notwithstanding that both men and women were covered with furs so as to leave scarcely more than the eyes visible. For, although during the greater part of the winter the temperature did not average a degree of cold of more than fifteen degrees below zero, there were many occasions upon which, had there been a spirit thermometer available, the alcohol would have been found to register at least forty degrees below zero. In cold like this, strange to say, the traveller will often feel the frost less when camping out in the snow than when passing the night in the shelter of a tent. Only those, however, who have actually been employed in out-of-door occupations in northern Canada in the winter time can realise the difficulty, under these climatic conditions, of avoiding being frost-bitten. Suddenly, when least expected, the nose, cheek, ear or hand which has been carelessly left uncovered becomes white and dead to all sensation ; it is then liable to mortify. Only the most violent and prolonged friction with a handful of snow can restore circulation in the affected part.

Geoffrey Digby, Father Antony and the little party of Indians left upon the island were well provided with coverings for the person. To begin with, they had plenty of warm duffle for the feet. This is a kind of woolly substance which is wound round and round feet and ankles before the moccasins are put on. Where a person wearing ordinary boots of stout leather and thick woollen stockings would have his feet frost bitten so that his toes would drop off, another accompanying him, wearing the ordinary tanned moose or deer-skin

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moccasins, over duffle, would find his feet comfortably warm.

A large camp-fire was always kept burning in the centre of the little enclosure, round which a stockade, nine feet high, having a ramp raised inside to stand upon if needed, built of stout larch trunks, was now raised. Nevertheless, it was found necessary also to keep fires constantly burning within the wigwams themselves, the smoke being allowed to escape slowly at the tops through the crevices where the poles crossed each other. Only Father Antony, although previously acclimatised to this smoke-dried existence, could now stand it no longer and indulged in the luxury of an iron stove in his teepee. This he had brought with him from Port Arthur on Lake Superior and, with its long pipe running up the middle of the wigwam, which it kept comfortably warm, it was the admiration of the Indians.

All of the teepees or wigwams were of the same description, being conical habitations formed by very long poles placed in a circle at bottom and crossed at the top. Upon this framework there were laid rolls of birch bark in strips, in most instances the birch bark being covered again with the skins of animals. As the winter had come on all crevices in the joints of the bark, or places where the skins overlapped each other, were carefully caulked with dried mosses stuffed tightly in, while the earth was heaped up outside all round the bottom of the teepee. The door hole was not so high as to admit even of a woman entering without stooping, and was carefully covered by a flap of bark and skins when closed—this it could be by thongs either on the outside or inside. Closed it usually was in the cold weather, although the condition of the occupants of the wigwam was then much the same as that of herrings smoking in a chimney.

However, by such devices it was that the sojourners upon the island contrived to keep themselves from perishing from cold, while skins of bears, lynxes and

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buffaloes, spread upon spruce boughs formed the couches and coverings for the same.

Fortunately, during the early part of the winter there was but little snow ; indeed, although sufficient for the purpose of tracking any animals, it was often unnecessary for Geoffrey and Big Beaver even to wear the racket-like snow-shoes upon their trapping and shooting expeditions to the mainland. In these operations, as they were able to travel pretty fast and easily over considerable distances in the day, they were successful far beyond their expectations. They succeeded in shooting a caribou or two, in addition to snaring many large hare-like rabbits, and trapping the fierce lynxes which prey upon the rabbits. It happened to be a good rabbit year, which takes place once in every seven years. In other years the rabbits diminish in quantity until they entirely disappear, when, as they become scarcer, so will the lynxes become gradually less in numbers also. As the skin of the lynx makes a beautiful and valuable fur, the hunters paid particular attention to the capture of these brutes. Nevertheless, on their trapping operations, or during their journeyings on the ice, in coming from or going back to the island, they were ever on the alert for the trail of the wolf in the snow.

For long that tell-tale mantle, covering the face of earth and water, which told the hunters as plainly as the pages of an open book the name of every kind of beast or bird that set its imprint thereon, remained innocent of all traces of the dreaded marauders. One day, however, shortly after Christmas time, the two men were returning to bring in the remaining parts of a caribou, which they had hung upon the boughs of a tree a few miles from camp.

All of a sudden Kichiamik, who was walking in front through some low bushes, exclaimed excitedly, "Wolf trail ! big timber wolf."

Geoffrey examined the dog-like footprints, which differed in nought, save to a hunter's eye, from those of the huskey dogs in the camp.

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"Pichinago? — Yesterday's trail?" he remarked, inquiringly.

"No, no—uski mikanna—kisshep, a new trail of this morning, quite fresh, Ready Rifle. Better cock your gun ready, they will be near the caribou-meat for sure? There have been three of them here."

"Then they will probably attack us," remarked Geoffrey, calmly; "for two will run away from a man alone, while three of the great wolves will always attack one man, and often will even attack two men, if hungry."

"Ugh! that's true, let's look out. Come up alongside me, Ready Rifle. If they fly at us suddenly we will get back to back. But shall we not turn and go back to camp, Ready Rifle?"

"No, not without the meat, for only three wolves," replied Geoffrey. "Of course there may be more of the brutes about, but we'll have a try for the caribou. Let us go on, we have not far to go. See, their trail leads to the big spruce where the meat hangs. Look, the quinquishi—the whiskey-jack—is flying about and screaming in the branches; he sees something close below him. Yes, there they are, Big Beaver, two grey and one black wolf!"

"Wah! wah! they are coming. Let us put our backs to this birch tree—Wé wip!" As the two men put themselves swiftly in an attitude to resist attack, three great gaunt brutes came lolloping straight for them. They halted, snarling, merely a few yards away, the bristles on their backs erect, and their great dog-like fangs glistening white as ivory, while big lolling tongues showed brightly red. The brutes paused in uncertainty ere determining to make their spring. This was the opportunity of the two tried hunters—brave men both who kept their ordinary coolness.

"You take the black one," said Geoffrey, and instantly, as the two barrels of his unerring Express rang out in quick precision, the two grey wolves bit the dust, or rather lay writhing in the snow.

Big Beaver's Winchester bowled over the big black

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wolf at the same second. It also now lay gnashing its huge fangs only a few feet away from the Redskin. Suddenly the magnificent creature, which was much larger than either of the other two, was up on its feet again and with a howl of rage sprang at the hunter's throat.

Big Beaver had barely the time to throw up his arms to protect himself when the black wolf's teeth had seized the loose sleeve of his buffaloskin coat, penetrating it and the leather jerkin and shirt below.

With a snarling growl it worried the man's arm, and would have borne him backwards save for the fact that his back was against the tree.

Not for long, however, was the struggle, for Geoffrey, quick as thought, dropping his rifle, drew from a leathern socket by his side a little tomahawk or axe, which he was carrying with him for the purpose of dismembering the joints of the caribou. In a second he crashed it through the brute's head into its brain, where it stuck tight, falling to the ground with the still writhing beast.

The Indian, his eyes glistening with fury, now plunged a knife into the wolf's throat. A moment later he rose, gave the carcass a kick, and laughed. "That knife wasn't wanted; you killed him, Ready Rifle! Big Beaver will not forget."

"Nonsense! it was merely lucky that I had the chopper. Are you hurt?"

"No, it is nothing, merely a bruise or two—see, the dog has scarcely drawn blood. You were too quick for him. Now let us get our meat and begone as quick as possible. We will come back here and skin the mahinganak later in the day, if we don't hear any more about."

"We will do better than that," said Geoffrey, as, without wasting any time, he climbed the spruce and commenced chopping down the branches, across which they had hung the caribou meat on the previous day. "We will," he continued, "bring a dog-sleigh and put the three carcasses on the sleigh without wasting any

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time here. There, catch that meat, Kichiamik. We cannot take it all, we will leave some for the little whiskey-jacks; they deserve their share, and shall have it accordingly."

"Ugh! yes, quin-quishi is a good bird!" responded Big Beaver. Thus the whiskey-jacks, the friendly little grey birds of the magpie tribe, which always so marvelously turn up in the Canadian wilds round a camp where there is anything to eat, or appear in the most barren grounds shortly after any animal has been killed, were left a good many dinners and breakfasts as a reward for a timely warning.

That afternoon the carcasses of the three wolves were taken in safety to the camp, and no more were seen in the neighbourhood for some time to come.

Meanwhile, all in the enclosure worked daily at the perfection of the stockade. The ramp formed inside to stand upon, so as to enable anyone to fire over the top-most log, was but a clumsy thing at first, formed of round logs, giving a very insecure foothold. Moreover, although five feet from the ground, there was no means of getting up to it, save by a scramble, not easy on frozen logs. The top of this standing platform was now levelled off with axes; it was also made wider, while steps were made up to it at various points around the enclosure.

CHAPTER XX

A FEARFUL ENCOUNTER

It was only after the hunters had skinned the three big timber wolves and were left with the flesh of their bodies to dispose of that Father Antony, who had never forgotten his old lessons learned as a trapper, remarked, as he came out to join Geoffrey by the blazing camp fire,—

“My dear Mr Digby, what a glorious opportunity we have wasted! I fear that we foolishly allowed Kichipinné to take away with him all of the poison that there was in camp, and he had a fine supply. Had we only thought of it in time we could have kept some for ourselves. We should have poisoned those three carcasses and laid them out at a distance from the camp; there is enough meat there to have poisoned a whole pack of wolves should any more have visited us.”

“We might, my dear Father, only have succeeded in poisoning the huskies,” replied Geoffrey.

“No, not so, my friend, for we never allow the dogs to wander far away, and we would have put these brutes at a distance of a mile or two. It is a pity!”

“Yes, indeed, an everlasting pity, Father; but now the dogs will get a good feed of flesh anyway, and they want it—so we must make the best of a bad job.”

“Yes, I suppose so,” replied Father Antony, and then he moved away.

Silver Bells, who was standing by when this conversation was taking place, now remarked, looking up tenderly at Geoffrey,—

“Ready Rifle, I want you to do Silver Bells a favour,

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and that is not to go away from camp so far any more. No, neither you nor Kichiamik must go so far now the mahinganak have come. Supposing that instead of only three wolves there had been six or more—what would have become of you then? What should we do supposing that some terrible misfortune should happen to you next time? Oh! will you not promise? Silver Bells could not bear even to let you go away this afternoon when you went to bring in the brutes that you had so bravely killed, but she said nothing then, for she knew that you would wish to save the skins. But now, Ready Rifle, will you not hear the words of Silver Bells, the daughter of the Crees, who loves you so that if you were gone Kisees—the sun—would lose his brightness and summer would be as winter in the lodges?”

Geoffrey took the little hand which was pushed out shyly toward him, and pressed it warmly within his own.

“You are right, Silver Bells; my duty is here now—near you; neither Big Beaver nor I will go any distance again, save to bring in all the traps to-morrow morning. Then you can come too, with Golden Arrow, your mother, Miriam, and Big Beaver’s squaw. Also the two lads and Father Antony must come. We will take you women and the priest on the dog-sleighs. We will all go together, and go armed. Thus there will be no danger to anyone left behind in the camp.”

“Gladly will Silver Bells come, but on her snow-shoes. Why should she come on the dog-sleigh like an old woman?” replied the maid, laughing. “Ready Rifle, if you will allow her Silver Bells would always like to follow you, whether on the hunting trail or on the war trail, to carry your extra cartridges,” the Indian maid added determinedly, with a bright gleam glistening in her expressive eyes.

Thus it came to pass that all the inhabitants of the island went out on the following day together, when all traps and snares were visited for the last time and brought in. As, during the journey homewards, Big

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Beaver, who was leading the first of the dog-sleighs, was so fortunate as suddenly to come upon a wandering bull moose, which he killed but a short distance from camp, the day was an eminently successful one. As the moose was very large, weighing considerably over a thousand pounds, there was not now, it was recognised, likely to be any more trouble about meat. For, without being dried over fire, the meat, both of the caribou and the moose, would keep frozen, to be used as wanted until the spring, while with the dried meat already in store there was plenty for all and to spare.

The necessary precaution was, however, taken of hauling all the meat, after disjointing it, well up into the trees on the island, where it was safe from either dogs, wolves or other predatory creatures.

The habit of burying the meat under large stones had for some time been abandoned, owing to the visits which a pair of wolverines had made previously. These brutes have such enormous strength in their claws that stones which it takes two strong men to lift are removed by them at their own sweet will with the greatest ease. Thus even the bodies of the dead are often, in spite of all efforts to secure them, torn up and devoured by these ferocious creatures. The two wolverines which had visited the island had been both captured and destroyed, but, with the lake ice-bound as it was, there was no security from the visits of more of their brethren or any other wild creatures.

A short time after the moose was killed the howlings of wolves began to be heard pretty frequently at night upon the mainland half a mile away, and even a few ventured occasionally out upon the ice in the daytime. These were always fired at, and several were killed by long shots when the weather was clear. A period, however, came of stormy weather with wild blizzards of snow, when nothing could be seen a yard beyond the stockade, and now the famished brutes made both day and night hideous with their howlings close at hand, which were answered by the howlings and furious barkings of the

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huskey dogs within. For the smell of the meat up in the trees, and the smell of the live meat, in the shape of the human beings, was too appetising for the wolves. They gradually collected in a larger quantity, and at length one night made a determined attack upon the stockade. It was an awful night of whirling snow, and despite all the noble and prolonged efforts of the men, including Father Anthony, to keep the brutes off, some number of them succeeded at length in surmounting the stockade by climbing up to the low boughs of an adjacent tree. Thence they sprang in and fell upon its defenders—dogs and men!

Geoffrey, who had been rapidly firing over the stockade while his betrothed had been standing behind him reloading, now instantly had the forethought to shut up Silver Bells and her mother securely inside their teepee, which was close to the stockade. He pushed Silver Bells inside by force, although she resisted, wishing to remain by him. Almost instantly the screams of the other women, the wife of Big Beaver and her daughter, Golden Arrow, heard in the semi-darkness above the howling of the wolves and awful worryings of the dogs, apprised all that a fearful catastrophe had taken place. Owing to the long period, extending to hours, that the ferocious attack of the pack of wolves had continued, it had been impossible for the men to continue to pay proper attention to the camp-fire; thus it was that the gaunt wolves, who fear a big blaze, were undeterred by fear of its less brilliant glow.

Now it was that the men, abandoning their rifles, seized upon half-burned brands with one hand and, with hunting knives or axes in the other, dashed at the terrible creatures which had penetrated the enclosure. The scene in and outside the wigwam of Kichiamik was indeed an awful one. Men, women, wolves, dogs were all together, tumbling over each other; the wolves and dogs snarling and howling, the women screaming, and the men striking with firebrands and knives wherever they saw a pair of green luminous eyes. Meanwhile,

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the wolves outside made the night still more hideous with their hellish din, while every minute or two a fresh one came leaping down over the stockade. In the middle of this scene of awful confusion a sudden blaze illumined the horrible struggle in the enclosure. It came as a welcome relief to those engaged in mortal combat with the wolves, but they were horror-stricken at its cause, which was that Father Antony's teepee was on fire ! Moreover, although the door, which had been open, was now in some inexplicable manner tightly closed, the most discordant howlings revealed the presence of wolves inside, roasting there in the flames. The resinous bark, which burns slowly like a torch, and than which there is nothing more inflammable, soon, in spite of the drifting snow, made the whole wild scene as light as day. The flames immediately made the seething mass of wolves within the stockade mad with terror, while the men and the huskey dogs fought and struggled with them over every yard of the blood-stained snow. The men fought now, however, with far greater chance of success, for they could see their enemies ; while the wild beasts, whose green shining eyes had enabled them to see so plainly but a few moments before, were dazzled by the brilliant light. In the midst of these horrors there was worse to come, for the wind, whirling large pieces of blazing bark against the wigwam of Big Beaver, set it on fire also. The Cree's wife had, however, already been torn to pieces by the devilish animals, while his young daughter, Golden Arrow, was also fearfully torn and lacerated by the cruel fangs of the wild beasts. When, fighting like a demon, her father, aided by Geoffrey, succeeded in killing the wolves in and immediately around the burning teepee and drawing the poor girl outside, Golden Arrow, one side of whose face was completely torn off, seemed to be in a dying condition. The rage of Big Beaver was now a terrible thing to behold, but when everyone was fighting for their lives none could tell, save momentarily, the actions of others during that awful confusion. Thus although

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shots were being heard in rapid succession outside the stockade, and it was observed that, mercifully, no more wolves were coming in, none knew who fired them. Both Father Antony and the two boys had, like Geoffrey and Big Beaver, been performing prodigies of valour, but each man fought for his own hand alone, being compelled to do so for his life.

Since the shots continued without, and no more wolves came springing down over the stockade, the men, fighting like demons within the enclosure, began to get the upper hand. They too, or some of them, repossessed themselves of their rifles. It now commenced to fare badly with the devilish brutes, although it was difficult to distinguish wolf from huskey dog. Still the glare helped considerably. As the blaze increased the flames and the reports of the guns terrified the wolves outside, so that the remainder withdrew to a little distance from the stockade, still making the night hideous with their ferocious howlings, which, however, became less and less as that steady fusillade continued. Their numbers were evidently being rapidly diminished, and yet the original number attacking had been so great that those remaining alive did not lose all courage or turn to flee all at once.

At length, as one by one the wolves inside were being despatched, Geoffrey suddenly noticed that he could see every one of the men and boys at once. And yet still the shots went on outside; he now noticed that they were being fired from a tree—the very spruce tree from the weighed-down boughs of which the wolves had sprung, using the platform of snow frozen on the broad surface to do so. Who then could it be? Whence had this blessed and unexpected assistance come, to save them all thus from annihilation? He blew out the brains of an already wounded wolf, and noticing only one left alive, which Big Beaver was furiously striking at with a hunting knife, Geoffrey determined to look and see. At the very moment that he had made up his mind to this he heard a piercing cry from the tree

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which froze his heart with terror. "Ready Rifle! Save Silver Bells! She is frozen, she cannot fire!"

Heaven! the agonised tones of the Indian maid, she whom he had fastened securely in her teepee!

Springing up upon the ramp he soon saw her form plainly in the spruce branches, while below, standing upon a heap of its dead and dying comrades on a high snowdrift, was the gaunt form of a wolf. It was reared upon its hind legs and had seized in its jaws the muzzle of a rifle of which the girl held the butt tight.

Geoffrey understood in a second; she was frost-bitten and could not let go of her rifle. In a moment she would be pulled down! A bullet from his Express was followed by a howl from the brute, which fell bleeding upon its comrades. But still Silver Bells remained holding her rifle in the same position. Although frozen, the brave girl had not, however, lost her head.

"Come out with the huskies, Ready Rifle—do not come alone—some of the mahinganak yet live—there are but few left, they will fly if you bring the huskies—Silver Bells will not fall."

Quick as thought, Geoffrey called the dogs; he called, too, wildly to the others, who also had heard the voice of Silver Bells. All were wounded, being bitten severely, as was Geoffrey himself, but each man and boy responded to the call and helped to cheer on the huskies without the gate, which Geoffrey opened. In a moment some of the fiercer dogs, whose blood was up, being roused by many wounds, were worrying and tearing at the half-dead brutes on the snow heap at the foot of the tree. The remainder ferociously pursued the remnant of the now flying pack, pulling down several which had been but slightly wounded by the rifle fire.

As Silver Bells—still clinging to her rifle—fell into the extended arms of Geoffrey, the last of the flames of the burning teepees died away into a red glow. Every wolf within the enclosure had breathed its last, while the two that had been shut inside Father Antony's teepee had been roasted alive. The smell of their burning flesh

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filled the whole air, but the wrought-up fierceness of the human combatants being now equal to that of the brutes they had fought with in such a deadly hand-to-hand encounter, this smell of the burning flesh brought with it, instead of repugnance, only a sense of intense satisfaction.

CHAPTER XXI

A NOBLE ACTION

THE scene, both without and within the stockade, was that of a bloody shambles, as the heroes of the conflict bore its heroine, rifle and all, back through the gateway.

That the terrors of the night might lose none of their intensity the awful blizzard, which by causing the piled-up snow-drift had enabled the wolves to climb on to the branches of the spruce, now fell. The moon also came out clear and cold to pitilessly disclose the awful havoc and desolation.

The principal objects to strike the eye upon re-entering the camp were the blackened and yet glowing circles where had stood the two comfortable teepees. Beside that of Big Beaver, frozen stiff in a pool of crimson blood upon the snow, were laid the distorted and mangled bodies of his wife and daughter; for little Golden Arrow had gone to join her mother in the silent kingdom. Alongside of their victims, and in other directions, were the carcasses of wolves stiffening in every conceivable attitude. Among them were stretched also carcasses of huskey dogs. Some of both were fearfully mangled and mutilated, their torn-out entrails now being frozen solid in a bloody heap.

Although hitherto the excitement of action had prevented the wounded and bleeding combatants from being frost-bitten, it was apparent to all, now the battle was ended, that, no matter how miserable they felt, they must seek shelter. This was sought in the teepee of Miriam, which, to Geoffrey's surprise, was still fastened on the outside as he had left it. For he had wasted no

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time in asking questions of the courageous maiden, both of whose hands were frozen and stiff and hard. Agonising as would be the process of thawing them, they would have to be thawed.

Taking into the teepee a large birch bark receptacle full of snow, it was at first endeavoured to plunge her hands into it, but the rifle could not be moved sufficiently even for this. Therefore, although his right wrist was almost bitten through, Geoffrey commenced rubbing one of Silver Bells's hands with a handful of snow, while her mother, the only sound being left in the whole camp, as vigorously attacked the other. It seemed for long as if the hands would never thaw, as if indeed the drastic measure would have to be resorted to of putting them in hot water. This, however, while it might succeed as a last resource, was not attempted. For it would be more probable to make them drop off at the wrist.

At length the circulation began slowly to return and the cramped fingers to relax their grip upon the stock of the gun. The awful pain which the brave daughter of the Crees then suffered was but too apparent from the expression of agony upon her features. Silver Bells, however, gripped her teeth tight and did not allow so much as a moan to escape from her lips.

Meanwhile, all of the others were also suffering more or less agony. Poor Father Antony's condition was perhaps the worst of all. He had, it now transpired, narrowly escaped death, having been forced down upon the snow by a wolf, which had inflicted a terrible bite upon his face, as well as other bites in several places, before Big Beaver shot it. His clothes were torn and drenched with blood. What he seemed to suffer from, however, more than anything else, was the effect of the long exposure to the bitter weather; the pain in his chest was, he said, agonising. At last unconsciousness brought him relief, and in that merciful condition he remained until daylight.

The others bound up their wounds in the best way they could with the few materials to hand, but the

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agony of grief of Kichiamik and his two brave boys was, in spite of their stoic silence, evidently greater than their bodily pain. Their anguished thoughts were with those two uncovered bodies out in the snow.

Geoffrey, owing to his wrist bleeding profusely, was at length compelled to stop rubbing the hands of Silver Bells with snow. By that time, however, they were thawed sufficiently for Miriam alone to continue until both, although still painful, had reassumed their normal condition.

Until then had been deferred any questions, but now Silver Bells told all that had taken place as far as her movements were concerned. Indeed, a large slit in the birch bark wall of the wigwam had already partly explained matters.

The Indian maid related her actions simply, addressing herself to Geoffrey.

"When, Ready Rifle, you left Silver Bells and her mother shut up in the teepee, the fearful anxiety soon became unbearable. The maiden who loved you, Ready Rifle, could not stay within in safety while you were fighting those demons without. Therefore, she took a big knife and cut a hole in the side of the teepee. Then, taking her father Kichipinne's small Winchester rifle, which fires eight shots without recharging the magazine, and more cartridges, she crept forth, leaving her mother with an axe within to watch the hole. Apparently her mother killed one wolf, from the blood yonder by the hole in the birch bark. Upon getting outside, all was noise, yelling and howling—nothing could be distinguished. Silver Bells thought, oh, Ready Rifle! that to save life light was necessary, even although it might bring with it destruction of valuable things, such as fur rugs and the Bible of Father Antony. Therefore did she, remembering the stove in the Father's teepee, determine to overturn it upon the spruce boughs of the couches and kindle a fire to give that light. Upon entering the teepee she opened the door of the stove and was about to scatter the fire on the spruce boughs when

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two wolves followed and flew at Silver Bells. Two shots, fired in quick succession, frightened the mahinganak, whereby she escaped unharmed. Nevertheless, even as she escaped, she kicked over the fire stove with her foot. Then oh, Ready Rifle, did Silver Bells close the door of the teepee upon those wolves and fasten it, even as you fastened her in yourself."

"Brave and noble heart!" exclaimed Geoffrey. "What splendid presence of mind you displayed!"

In spite of the sadness of the situation, the maiden could not restrain a smile of satisfaction at this encomium from the man who was, as she had proved, more dear to her than life itself. She then took up once more the thread of her story.

"As Silver Bells heard by the crackling within that the fire was catching, avoiding one or two wolves, she sprang by the steps up on to the ramp of the stockade. As she did so she observed that more wolves were coming in over the barrier, jumping down from the bough, which the snow frozen on it had weighed down. Silver Bells shot at one as it sprang, but perceiving that she was not tall enough to shoot over the stockade so as to prevent them from climbing to that bough, she determined, oh, Ready Rifle, to get up into the tree herself. Before doing so she re-charged the magazine of the little rifle. It had eight cartridges in it when Silver Bells sprang up at the bough, for a moment frightening a wolf away that was standing on the heap of snow below the tree.

"Then she shot that wolf, Ready Rifle!—it made one less!"

The admiration of the listeners to the noble girl's recital was now manifest by the low "wah! wahs!" of the Indians. Geoffrey's astonishment at such bravery in the Indian girl was too great for words. He could only tenderly throw his unwounded arm around her and reverently kiss the noble head which had sufficient brain power to think of lighting such a fire at such a time, and then been able not only to think of climbing the

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tree among the wolves, but also to dare to carry out the noble resolve.

"After that," continued Silver Bells, "many more wolves came ; they reared themselves up against the tree one or two at a time. But Silver Bells shot them all ! Those she did not kill she wounded and frightened away, at all events for a few minutes. Thus she was enabled to load again ; but her hands were getting colder all the time, and she feared that she still would not save you within from the attack of more. She did, however, as you know, Ready Rifle, for when she saw, by the light of the blazing teepees, that there were but a few wolves left alive within the stockade, Silver Bells determined that, even if her hands were to drop off or she be frozen to the tree, she would fire at the mahinganak to the last moment. But her hands froze to the rifle and the wolf seized it. And then you came, Ready Rifle, that is all."

"Yes, that is all !" ejaculated Geoffrey, "and it is enough to make the name of Silver Bells famous for ever and in every land."

"Silver Bells does not wish to be famous. Her sole thought is of gratitude to the great Manitou, of whom the good Father has taught her, that she was enabled to save the lives of Ready Rifle and all assembled here in this teepee."

Which was, in good sooth, what this splendid young creature had done, by her unparalleled heroism and presence of mind. She now had the satisfaction of learning that neither the Father's Bible nor many valuable furs had been destroyed. For all these were buried, with Geoffrey's cartridges, in a large and dry receptacle dug under the floor of the teepee.

CHAPTER XXII

A TIME OF WAITING

SAD indeed was the condition of all upon the island when the late dawn of the following day lightened up the wintry skies. For the wounds of the previous night, owing to the intense cold, became more painful, while joints and limbs were stiffened to such an extent that both men and boys could scarcely move. The hands of Silver Bells gave her intense pain, so that she was incapable of using them. Nothing, it seemed at first, could be done to remove the evidences of the awful carnage in that awful camp.

Nevertheless, in great emergencies, the manner in which the will of the mind can overcome the incapacity of the body is often made apparent. Accordingly, when, an hour or two after daylight, Miriam had contrived to cook some food for all, to wash and bind up their wounds afresh for the sufferers, Geoffrey realised that something would have to be done, even if an almost superhuman effort was required to move himself or arouse the others to assist him. Especially did he recognise the necessity of at once cutting away the boughs along which the wolves had run and of clearing away the big heap of snow at the foot of the tree. Taking Miriam with him, he painfully crawled outside the encampment and directed her to remove the boughs, which, being, like all Indian women, handy with an axe, she was not long in doing. And then, with shovels made of birch bark, they worked together at the snow heap, he using his left hand. They removed the snow but, for want of strength, were unable to drag away the bodies of the

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great grey wolves. Having procured a rope, the two now together dragged in through the gateway the spruce branches which they had cut off, and by so doing secured the safety of the camp. These they reverently placed over the bodies of the two unfortunate women, whose mangled faces and bodies were ghastly and terrible to behold. Having done so much, and also thrown logs upon the camp fire, Geoffrey endeavoured to arouse Big Beaver and his two brave boys from the lethargic state of despair into which they had fallen, pointing out that they must exert themselves or die. There was not room for all in the teepee of Miriam, moreover, although during the night, while so closely confined there, the assembly of so many human beings in such a small space had kept sufficient heat among them to preserve life, other arrangements, both for warmth and lodging, would now have to be made. For all the dressed fur skins and buffalo robes in the two burned teepees had been of course destroyed, while any undressed skins of animals recently trapped were frozen too stiff to be of any use for coverings; indeed, even if not frozen there would be no warmth in untanned hides.

Geoffrey therefore reminded his fellow-sufferers that, while only materials for one had been taken for their journey, two teepees had been left standing within the enclosure by Kichipinné and his braves. He called their attention to the fact that into those teepees had been thrust every imaginable article of which the wayfarers had no immediate need. Then they had been fastened up securely. They had now, he said, merely to make an effort to rise and assist him to overhaul these teepees, search them for spare buffalo robes, which they were sure to contain, and pull out all unnecessary lumber. After this they would be fit to live in.

Neither Big Beaver nor his sons, however, would make any effort to move from the attitude of listless misery in which they were lying. Indeed, crushed down by their weight of woe, in addition to the pain they were suffering, they seemed incapable of all action.

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Although he did not express his suspicions on the point, Geoffrey imagined that all these were determining to die, which he had previously seen Redskins who were tired of life succeed in doing by sheer will power.

As Father Antony's condition was just then so miserable that Miriam could no longer be spared from his side, Geoffrey, in despair, started to limp off across the enclosure once more, intending to endeavour to accomplish the business alone with his unwounded left hand, an almost impossible task. As he picked his way drearily among the carcasses of the wolves, alongside each of which there was a crimson patch in the snow, he heard a gentle voice behind him.

"Ready Rifle, Silver Bells will help you to unfasten the wigwams and pull out the things; her hands are better now."

"You, dear Silver Bells! No, I cannot allow you to try to assist me. You will get frost-bitten again, and then you will lose your hands!"

"No, Ready Rifle, Silver Bells has wrapped her hands in duffle; she feels no pain; she will never allow you to struggle alone when you suffer so greatly."

Despite all his remonstrances, the brave girl, keeping up the fiction that she suffered nothing, now exerted that will power of which we have just spoken with such determination that she worked, indeed, as if she were uninjured—worked, too, with such a will, in her efforts to spare her lover, that soon she actually forgot her pain.

Before long her hands began to recover their normal strength, the exertion doing them good. The pair who, with mutual love and confidence, were thus working together soon proved fortunate in discovering all kinds of useful articles in the two teepees, the one great cause for anxiety being removed when half-a-dozen thick buffalo robes or blankets were uncovered from a piled-up heap of canvas tents, among which was one which belonged to Geoffrey himself.

After this most satisfactory discovery the next thing

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they did was to sally forth once more and, after knocking the frozen snow off them with an axe, to bring in sufficient of the softest spruce shoots, which were handy wherewith to make a couch for Father Antony. To find these, and the still softer shoots of the sweet-scented Canada balsam, the pair were obliged to wander to the farthest edge of the island. As they did so they kept a good look-out for wolves, but with the exception of one or two dead ones upon the island, and one or two more lying at intervals out on the ice towards the mainland, there were no signs of the marauders of the night before. Fortunate, indeed, was this, for neither was in a state for using a rifle, while the surviving huskey dogs, some of which accompanied them, were all so terribly mauled that they could barely crawl along.

To these poor creatures they did not forget to give some food. Much, much more was there requiring to be done, but Geoffrey and Silver Bells were unable to accomplish it alone. Moreover, the intense cold made it necessary for them to return to rest close to the camp fire. After this they both were of one mind as to the necessity of arousing Big Beaver from his state of lethargy. This Silver Bells undertook to do, by using her powers of persuasion to represent to him that it was his duty to rouse himself for the sake of his young boys, who required him more than ever now that they had neither mother nor sister.

Further it was agreed that Silver Bells was to impress upon the mind of the Redskin that if he did not come to do something towards helping to dispose of the bodies of his unfortunate wife and Golden Arrow they would most probably be eaten on the following night by wolverines.

The fear of such a gruesome fate for the mortal remains of those near and dear to him at length aroused Big Beaver from his brooding sorrow. No sooner was he aroused than he became a man again, capable of self-sacrifice and exertion, despite the terrible bites from which he was suffering, which were chiefly about the lower part of the body and legs. He came forth, at

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Geoffrey's suggestion, bringing an axe, for although he could scarcely crawl he could move his arms.

Owing to the ground being frozen as hard as iron any idea of burial was impossible. Geoffrey, however, had thought of a plan to prevent the poor shattered corpses from desecration. This was to drag them along upon a wapiti hide to the lake and there to cut a couple of holes in the thickness of the ice deep enough to place the bodies in. Then to cover them up again with the chips of ice and pour water over them, when they would be frozen in solid at once. In this manner there would be no scent left by which the human remains could be discovered by wolverines or any other animals. This task was effected accordingly, and there in the ice the two poor things were left until the spring, when it was proposed to remove them and give them a decent burial.

Although, in the first instance, the idea had not occurred to any of those engaged in this unhappy task, it dawned upon Geoffrey almost before it was completed, that since before the spring broke the survivors would have to travel north upon the ice the ground would still be too hard for their interment. There would, therefore, so it struck him, be no alternative but to leave the bodies in the ice until it melted, when they would become food for the fishes in the lake. Since these very fish might one day be caught and eaten this eventuality seemed to him most horrible, but thinking over the alternative, only that of cremation occurred to his mind, and that he knew would be most repugnant to the Redskins. In any case, the quantity of wood to ensure cremation would be more than could be spared.

Moreover, for want of a proper furnace, even then there would probably be left gruesome relics, such as the skulls or some of the bones of the victims. This Geoffrey knew from personal experience upon his early shooting expeditions in India, where he well remembered to have seen the partially-burned bodies of the Hindoos scattered along the banks of the rivers. He well recollected how upon one occasion, when fishing

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for the mighty mahseer in the River Nerbudda in the Central Provinces, his hook had become entangled in what he thought at first to be a stone at the bottom. Upon drawing in his line carefully, greatly to his horror he had brought in a human skull, his hook being fastened in the socket hole of the eye. Careful not to mention his fears to Big Beaver, whose slower mind had not foreseen eventualities, Geoffrey communicated them to Silver Bells.

For he had come now to have such thorough confidence in the intelligence of the Indian maid, all untutored as she was, that he thought it possible that, even when his brain might not be able to grasp one, hers might be able to discern a remedy. Nor was he disappointed in his estimate of her capacity of thinking out the solution of the problem.

After pondering awhile upon the subject, Silver Bells disclosed the plan that she had thought out. It was simple enough in all conscience, although one that might so easily go undreamed of.

"There is a means, Ready Rifle, by which we can give a Christian burial to poor Golden Arrow and her mother, nor need we wait longer to do so than until our arms have recovered enough strength to make their graves sufficiently deep to keep out Cacajou—the wolverine. Him, however, we must in all cases deceive, and that will be easy to do. Have you not thought, oh, my beloved ! of the fact that we always build the great camp fire in the same place? Indeed it is but rarely allowed to become extinguished. It seems to Silver Bells that the earth under the place of the fire must be soft, even if all around it be frozen to a depth of eight feet or more. In that spot, therefore, will we bury them, and since the priest is here, even if ill, he will be able to repeat the words of the burial service before we commit them to the grave. Then we will burn a fire again over the spot and leave the charred logs so as to deceive cacajou or mahingan. For the smell of fire will always remain ; moreover, the wild beasts will see the burnt

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sticks and, cunning though they be, will never think of the corpses of our dead below. A wooden cross we will then drive into the softened earth through the ashes, and we will put a railing round the spot. Silver Bells has spoken. Are her words good, Ready Rifle?"

Geoffrey looked at the maid with eyes of astonishment. This cunning of the Indian, whereby the cunning of the beasts of the forest should be outwitted, filled him with admiration. In due course the cleverly-devised plan of Silver Bells for the sepulture of the unfortunate victims of the ferocity of the great grey wolves was carried out, but that was not until some weeks had elapsed. The weeks passed slowly and drearily away in the little encampment, after the night of the fateful encounter, until by degrees all, with the exception of the good priest, recovered health and strength, only the scars remaining to show where the fangs of the wolves had bitten deep.

As those weeks of winter, cold and bitter winter, dragged on their leaden course, it seemed to Geoffrey, thrown as he now was into hourly communion with Silver Bells, that it was but right and proper that their marriage should be celebrated. In the life that they led, together almost every minute of the day, they were like husband and wife without being husband and wife. It was a situation of great trial, and Silver Bells no less earnestly than he desired her immediate union to Ready Rifle. Indeed, it seemed to them both, under the circumstances of this constant close companionship, that it would be more seemly that they should be wed. Miriam also now saw matters in the same light, and joined them both in urging upon the priest that he should make them man and wife.

An additional cause for the anxiety of all was that, so great a sufferer had he become, there was always the fear that the Father might die leaving the pair unwed, exposed to the risk and temptations in which, by the strength of their mutual passion, they would become involved.

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Weak as he was, upon his agonising couch of sickness, Father Antony was, however, firm in his refusal to accede to the ardent wishes of all upon this point. He gave his reasons for declining: first, that Geoffrey had not yet been received into the Catholic Church; secondly, that he himself had promised to Kichipinné that he would wait until the spring to unite his daughter, Silver Bells, to the white man who had learned to love and cherish her. There was no moving him from the standpoint that he had assumed. Vainly, like Henry of Navarre before him in his vain arguments with the witty Abbé du Perron, did Geoffrey now implore his friend to allow him to take the Catholic doctrines all in a lump. This Father Antony would not listen to. Moreover, although the most docile of pupils, Geoffrey found, strange to relate, that his instruction did not make much progression, and this despite his own good will in the matter. He was in despair, but he plainly saw that the delay was intentional on the part of the priest. He wondered at times if the Father did not see the temptation to which he was exposing him and Silver Bells of taking the law into their own hands by simply consummating their marriage in the fashion of the Crees before conversion. The casuistical priest, however, had not overlooked this point, but he had no fear. He understood his friend's noble nature, he had judged Geoffrey rightly, and knowing him to be the soul of honour, was convinced that, a Christian, he would not persuade, or rather permit, Silver Bells, a Christian maiden, to join him in what they must both know to be a sin.

Had Father Antony been strong and well Geoffrey felt at last, in his exasperation, as if he would have liked to have taken him violently by the shoulders and shaken him, beaten him—done anything to overcome his studied delay. But with the man upon whom consumption had evidently set her mortal grip there was nothing to be done. Even to speak angrily to him might, Geoffrey felt, be sufficient, by making him excited in turn, to

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bring on pain, fits of coughing, possibly hæmorrhage. Good fellow as he was, Geoffrey, therefore, bore his cross in silence, but it was hard to bear. Moreover, instead of exciting in his betrothed feelings of rebellion and discontent, sensations she was already inclined to indulge in against the priest, he assumed with her a calmness that he did not feel. He made excuses for the Father upon the grounds of his illness, pretended to Silver Bells that he believed in the priest's religious scruples, did anything rather than allow her to have an inkling of the conviction within his own mind that Father Antony's scruples were casuistically a mere pretence for delay. In acting in which manner, under such trying circumstances, it must be conceded that, whatever his religion, whether Protestant or Catholic, Geoffrey Digby most assuredly displayed the self-abnegation and worthy spirit of a true Christian.

CHAPTER XXIII

SILVER BELLS SEEKS KNOWLEDGE

TIME wore on, but still the wolves, or rather the remainder of them, did not leave the vicinity of the camp. By day their howlings would be heard upon the mainland, while at night they would venture once more to the island, when their green luminous eyes could be seen moving about under the trees by anyone looking through the stockade. These wicked eyes, seen night after night, when no other part of the animal could be distinguished, had a very weird and indeed terrifying effect upon the nerves of the inhabitants of the camp, in which the little party were, for a time, practically besieged by the ravenous brutes. For they, attracted by the carcasses of their fellows, came nightly to devour them. Thus, as they fought with each other with fiendish growls, even above their howlings and snarlings could the cracklings be heard as with their powerful jaws the wolves smashed up the bones of their former comrades in the pack. Every precaution was taken to make another storming of the stockade by the brutes impossible, traps placed all around it, firmly attached to the lower log of the stockade, proving of considerable assistance in keeping them at a distance. After one or two had been caught in these traps, although these were torn out of them and eaten by their comrades, the others became suspicious and afraid to approach too close. For they feared the traps, which were now left exposed on purpose to frighten them away. Until Geoffrey's right arm became sufficiently well for him to use his rifle, before which some time elapsed, Big Beaver used to fire at the luminous

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eyes by night. He was not, however, by any means so dead a shot as Geoffrey and seldom succeeded in planting a bullet between these horrid eyes, as their gleaming lights flashed about like huge fireflies in the under bush. No wonder if, after the fearful experiences already recorded, sleep became almost impossible to all save in the daytime. For, even if the state of nervous tension would have permitted rest, the fierce howling and barkings of the huskey dogs would not admit of any repose. These, being sadly reduced in number, were carefully kept fastened up inside, for no more could be spared to lose their lives in unequal conflict against superior numbers of brutes more powerful than themselves.

No sooner, however, had he recovered sufficiently to use his trigger finger once more, than the wolves began to feel the effects of Ready Rifle's accurate fire.

With a small piece of white linen tied over the foresight of his Express, it seemed, indeed, as if he could shoot with as much rapidity and precision at night as in the daytime. Every report resulted in a kill, or at anyrate in sending a wounded brute howling away to be torn to pieces by its fellows. The result of this was that after a time hardly a wolf ventured on the island at all, although the remnant of the pack still frequented the neighbourhood. The two men now commenced trapping them in earnest, upon the ice, in an ingenious manner, using for the purpose the carcasses of those wolves which had been killed within the stockade upon the night of the great battle. These bodies of wolves had been reserved by Geoffrey for this express purpose, and the way in which they were utilised was as follows. Having been thawed out before the camp fire, they were opened. The steel traps were set inside the animals' entrails, after the carcasses had been dragged out on to the ice. To this they were moored by a simple device, merely that of letting down, through a hole previously cut, a lariat formed of strips of wolf skin, at the end of which was fastened a stick. This, being pushed down straight, turned sideways under the ice ;

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it therefore held like an anchor. The traps themselves were fastened by the strongest tendons drawn out of the legs of wolves, and were securely tied to the leg of the bait, then the tendons were covered with a piece of the entrails, which froze all over it. Everything thus smelling of wolf, the animals were unsuspicious. Upon coming to feast upon the corpses of their comrades, they first of all went for the part that had been cut open in the belly. Upon thrusting in their gaunt muzzles, the cruel steel jaws of the trap caught them and held them by their own jaws securely. Thus they either died or remained until the hunters despatched them at daylight. By degrees a good many were destroyed in this manner, but it took much time and skill to carry out this plan effectually ; moreover, the carcasses would not catch a wolf two nights in succession in the same place. Thus Ready Rifle and Big Beaver found plenty of occupation for the few hours of daylight, continually exerting their ingenuity until at length they had destroyed, in one manner or another, nearly every wolf in the pack. At length not one remained to be seen, nor was a howl heard at night. There was then, at last, absolute rest upon the island. It was during one of these mornings, when the men were away, that Silver Bells came to the teepee of Father Antony. It had been made as comfortable now as had his preceding one ; the stove had been set up inside it as before, while a sufficiency of rough clothing had been procured, both for the Father himself and the other men, from the stores which had been overhauled. Miriam left the wigwam to see about some cooking operations, just as the tinkling sound of the bells upon the silent snow warned the Father of the approach of the Indian maid, whose presence he had latterly missed from his lodge. The girl entered, closed the flap of the door securely, then sat down upon the skins on the floor, saying no words and with cast-down eyes. As she sat thus in silence, although she, coming in from the bright light without, could scarcely see by the glow of the single

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small lamp within, the priest, as he sat upon his couch, could observe her closely. He noticed at once upon her countenance an expression which, in all the years that he had showered his fatherly affection upon this Indian maid, he had never seen before. It was one of half defiance, half sorrow. He watched her comely face for a time, expecting her to speak, but seeing that she uttered no word, himself addressed her.

"Well, Silver Bells, why have you not been to see me? Has anything been the matter?"

She looked up, gave him a long piercing glance, then looked down again ere replying rapidly, in a low tone, "What should ail with Silver Bells save that her Father loves her no longer?"

Father Antony was astonished.

"Do you mean that I love you no longer, my child?"

"My Father, who has taught Silver Bells all she knows, my Father, in whom is the Spirit of the Great Manitou, surely knows the meaning of his daughter. Does not his heart tell him that his daughter is sad? What has Silver Bells done that the Great Manitou should make my Father wish his daughter to live in sorrow? Was she not ever hitherto a good and faithful child to him? Why does he punish her now? Why does he turn her heart to lead—that heart which, but a few moons since, sprang like Adjitumo, so lightly from branch to branch, towards Kisees, so brightly shining overhead? Now, like Amik—the beaver, it sinks out of sight to the bottom of the silent creek. In what has the daughter of the Crees offended my good Father?"

"My daughter, I grieve to learn that you are sad, but in nought have I sought to punish you, in nought have you offended me. Nay, you have ever been a good child, one whom I would far rather reward than punish. Why have you not told me of your sorrow that I might console it?"

There was a ring almost approaching to anger in the measured tones with which Silver Bells replied after first heaving a deep sigh.

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“Wherefore should the daughter of the Crees disclose her sorrow to him who causes it? Was it for the sake of the child of the Redskins, or the sake of my Father, that Ready Rifle came hither? Why should my Father have brought to Silver Bells the son of the white chief and taught her to see that he was good? Wherefore when she, who never loved before, has learned to love my Father’s friend, should he refuse to the Indian maid the desire of her soul? Who is there save my Father who, for reasons unknown to the maiden who lives in the lodges of Kichipinné, leaves her to wander alone?”

It was impossible after this passionate outburst for Father Antony to misunderstand the meaning of the Indian maiden.

“You mean, Silver Bells,” he inquired, “why do not I accede to the request of Ready Rifle and unite you to him at once? You surely know my reasons—you have heard them from Miriam, your mother. You are well aware, my child, that I have good cause for my delay.”

“Silver Bells has indeed heard the reasons which my Father has given to Miriam, but she knows not the real reason which he hides in his heart. Therefore she understands not the cause for the delay which makes her heart sick.”

“Yet is not the child of the Crees a fool, therefore she asks of her Father to explain truly to her this matter.

“For should it be aught which she in her ignorance knows nought of, which yet may be for the welfare of Ready Rifle, then should she be taught its meaning; although she suffer, yet will she not rebel. Nay, even for his sake would she silently depart to join Golden Arrow in the land of death. If Silver Bells can love, yet would she also not harm Ready Rifle. Hitherto she has not understood why the daughter of Kichipinné may not be taken to the lodge of her beloved. My Father, even if bitter and deep be the pain of learning, yet would she learn. My Father, Silver Bells has spoken!”

Father Antony would have indeed been less than human had he not been moved by these self-sacrificing

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words. Being, on the contrary, a man with a very human heart he felt them intensely. For it was his very humanity which had made him think of Silver Bells and point out to Geoffrey the terrible responsibility which he would be assuming towards her if he married her. It was his very humanity again which made him think so much of Geoffrey and his possibly wrecked future that he had so strongly urged him to leave the Indian girl for the sake of his own happiness and that of those to whom he was dear in another land. Now that he was put with his back to the wall, as it were, by this Indian girl, he paused long before he replied to her. This his illness gave him an ample excuse for doing, as a fit of the terrible cough from which he now suffered attacked him just then. When it was past he lay for a long time in silence, thinking what he should say and what he should not say. Until that day he had really been hoping against hope that something might happen which might relieve him from the responsibility of this marriage; that had really been the reason of his delay. As he lay back there thinking, the good man came to a rapid conclusion. He would not ruin the dream of happiness of this brave-hearted girl by painting the possible future to her in as black colours as he had done to her betrothed. On the other hand, he would not hurry the marriage before the time fixed upon with Kichipinné. "The future is in God's hands," he thought, "and it is not for man to endeavour to make or mar destiny."

Having determined thus, he spoke most kindly to Silver Bells. Placing his hand upon her head affectionately, he told her to fear nothing. He had, he said, at one time had fears, owing to the circumstances of their having been born of different religions, in different worlds, of different races, that eventualities might arise to cause Ready Rifle to wish to return to his own people. But he owned that he saw no sign in him which denoted in any way any such desire, or indeed any other than one of intense love for herself. She might, therefore, said

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Father Antony, make her mind happy, he was no longer against the marriage. But he considered that it would be only right that her father should be present upon such a solemn occasion—the most solemn event of her life. He thought, moreover, that upon reflection Silver Bells would agree with him in that matter. Then the priest dwelt for a short time to the young girl upon the disadvantage to the possible children if husband and wife were of different faith, and promised her that by the time the marriage should actually take place there should be no possible fear of any disagreement in the household upon that score. To ensure, he said, that there should never be any differences of opinion between her and Geoffrey, he thought it not only right but wiser that he should be properly grounded in what was to be their mutual religion. This he assured the Indian maiden that Ready Rifle soon now would be.

The result of this conversation was that, when Silver Bells left Father Antony's teepee, she did so with a far more cheerful heart than when she had entered it. For she was convinced now, even if he still persisted in delaying it until the spring, that the good Father was not, as she had imagined, against her marriage with Ready Rifle.

CHAPTER XXIV

A HIBERNATING BEAR

OWING to the long continuance of the winter and Father Antony's ill-health it was not until the month of May that the party on the island started, with their dog-sleighs, for an eighty-mile journey over the ice to The Point.

Although so late in the season there had been several heavy snow-storms after May had begun, which was likely to make the travelling heavy. For instead of a frozen surface, over which the huskey dogs could travel along merrily, the runners of the sleighs would sink into the freshly-fallen snow and therefore run heavily. There was, moreover, likely to be another disadvantage, in the shape of snow slush, should the sun succeed in shining out through the clouds. This he had often done during the month of April, although then, as his power was less, neither the snow nor the ice under it had been in the least affected by his rays.

Three long sleighs started accordingly from the little island early one morning in May, each one being drawn by four strong dogs, while one or two more ran loose, ready to be harnessed should any of those attached to the sleighs show signs of extra fatigue. Father Antony, as much wrapped up as possible, was upon the first sleigh with a certain amount of baggage, and to this sleigh Big Beaver, armed with a long whip, acted as dog-runner, travelling on his snow-shoes alongside, directing the huskies, and punishing them cruelly if lazy or obstinate. Each dog was harnessed separately, one being behind the other, to prevent them from fighting. The two boys

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had charge of the middle sleigh, which was heaped up with a canoe, tents, traps, food, furs, in fact all the paraphernalia of the camp. Upon the third sleigh sat Miriam and Silver Bells. It also was heaped up with all kinds of odds and ends, in the middle of which Geoffrey, who was dog runner to this sleigh, had contrived a comfortable nest for the two women. They both had their snow-shoes with them on the sleigh, but for the sake of quickness in travelling neither of them was allowed to run, for they would not have had the necessary strength to keep up in the loose snow.

It was agreed on starting that each of the three sleighs should lead in turn, thus acting as trail-breaker for the others which followed behind in Indian file. This was an excellent arrangement, which reduced the amount of labour to be performed by each set of dogs during the day to considerably less than it would have been had but one sleigh been travelling alone. The men running alongside on their snow-shoes also found it less monotonous to have an occasional change of position, it seemed to make the work less tiring. Moreover, at times, those running with the second and third sleigh jumped upon them to take a rest. For so long as the huskies in the first sleigh were kept going the others would almost follow of their own accord without requiring much driving.

As all said farewell to the island and the little encampment with its cross now reared in the centre of the stockade, it was with mingled feelings. Sorrow, at saying good-bye to the home of so many months, sadness also, for the two poor souls left behind, were, no doubt, the first and principal sensations. But other sensations and livelier ones there were in the hearts of most of the party. A sense of relief, to be on the move once more, was strong within all. The hope of spring also was cheering. This it seemed to the travellers somehow as if they were going forth to meet—as indeed they were. And with that hope of spring, whose coming could now only be delayed for a few days longer, there was a far

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stronger hope for two of their party—Ready Rifle and Silver Bells expected confidently to be made one before another week should pass over their heads.

Had the snow been in good going order the eighty-mile journey might have been accomplished in a couple of days with good dogs going strong. Indeed so much as sixty miles in a day is occasionally accomplished by these useful animals of the Eskimo breed. Moreover, a good Indian dog-runner will at times have sufficient endurance to cover that distance upon his snow-shoes. Five miles an hour for eight hours in the day would not therefore be at all too much to expect under such conditions. As it was, no sooner had the party started to the northwards across the vast expanse of frozen lake, than it was found that three days at the very least would be required for the journey. For never, so it seemed, as they coasted up within sight of the eastern shore, had the ice been so rough. After only a few hours of travelling, the western bank had reached so far into the distance as to be absolutely invisible—thus the wide frozen expanse was dreary in the extreme. Nevertheless, with hope in their hearts, they journeyed onwards, cutting across from point to point wherever a little promontory jutted out into the lake. As, all along the shore near which they were travelling the forest trees had been burned in the preceding summer, the charred and blackened spindles or the denuded trunks, like so many burned telegraph poles standing out against the snow, added to the weird solemnity of the wintry scene. Not a bird, not an animal, nor the tracks of either were visible anywhere—all was snow—and silence. Not even a white-headed eagle, which, feeding chiefly on fish, frequents these waters in the open season, was now to be seen soaring overhead, his harsh cries resounding sharply through the air. No loon, swan, goose, teal or wild duck was there, all were still in the waters far away to the south. Yet before three more weeks had elapsed these feathered fowls would be seen again flying to the northwards by thousands, just as they had journeyed southwards in the

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fall. Even now, in the lagoons of Florida and Mexico, where they had been feasting all the winter on the wild celery, they were preening their wings and flying round uneasily, feeling within them the loud cry of Nature urging them to get ready to depart upon soaring pinions for their breeding haunts far away in the silent north.

How wonderful indeed are the workings of Nature in these wilds! How miraculous the unfailing instinct which, without almanac or calendar, teaches the wild birds and quadrupeds the times and seasons when they should change their habits, dwell in one place rather than in another. Already, ere this, had the migratory caribou started on their returning journey northwards to the Barren Lands—already, too, upon their trail had followed the fierce wolves, ever on the look out to pull down and devour the weaklings of the herds.

The fact of this inevitable annual fulfilment of the laws of Nature was borne in upon our travellers with disagreeable emphasis no later than during the first night of their journey.

Having, by nightfall, reached the confines of the burnt country, they landed upon a promontory and camped there in the shelter of a belt of spruce trees. Here they contrived to make themselves warm and comfortable, the more so as they noticed not without anxiety that the air was becoming milder.

A camp-fire was built and cooking operations were got under way, frozen fish forming the staple food for men and dogs alike. For the latter it was not considered even necessary to thaw the fish, their powerful jaws breaking them up as if they were but so much bread.

The remnants of the meal having been thrown out, all retired to rest wrapped up in their buffalo robes, and save in the little tent where reposed Father Antony, slumber soon reigned supreme in the encampment.

An hour before dawn this slumber was rudely broken for all, owing to the fierce barkings of the huskey dogs. These, to prevent the possibility of their

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journeying back on their own account to the camp upon the island, had been all secured to trees, those in harness being left in harness ready for an early start. Thus, despite their evident desire to rush out upon whatever was disturbing them, they were unable to do so.

Upon awakening and springing from their blankets the little party were all dismayed to find that a drizzling rain was just commencing. That foreboded badly for the ensuing day's travelling, but, as the violent wolf-like barking of the huskies continued, they had other subjects with which to occupy their thoughts for the moment.

"Ugh!" said Big Beaver, as he seized his rifle and peered out into the darkness of the bushes, "I think Makwah come out of his hole; he think it time to wake up from his winter sleep."

"Yes, indeed, Big Beaver," responded Geoffrey, standing beside the Indian with his Express loaded and cocked, "it must be bear. He has got tired of sucking his paws for sole nourishment, and now has come here attracted by the smell of our fish; the brute must be close by us roaming round the camp; he has probably picked up the remains that were thrown out and is looking for more. He will not be particular either, whether it be man, woman, dog or fish, being savage with hunger after his long fast."

While the two hunters were vainly looking in one direction, suddenly a cry was heard from Silver Bells, who had, instantly upon springing from her couch, rushed to replenish the fire.

Seizing a half-burnt brand, her anklets tinkling loudly as she ran, the Indian maid rushed behind the tent wherein reposed the sick priest. With another loud cry the burning stick was seen whirling through the air like a rocket. Like a rocket also, it burst into a shower of bright sparks as it struck some dimly discerned object. A crashing was heard in the bushes of a large body retreating, while Silver Bells, running back, seized Geoffrey by the arm.

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"It was Makwah, Ready Rifle. Silver Bells saw his ugly head just as he was pushing it under the back of the Father's tent. Wah! wah! Makwah has gone off a bit surprised," the girl added, laughing. "His coat was singed from drying it too near the fire, he will not come back to-night. We can sleep now."

"What keen vision there is in those bright eyes of yours, Silver Bells; you always see just where the danger lies. How ready to meet it. Brave Silver Bells!"

"Oh, Ready Rifle!" replied the maiden, merrily, for she was happy in her heart in anticipation of her coming bliss, "do you think that Silver Bells was going to allow Makwah to eat Father Antony! Who then would there have been to marry us?"

"Wah! wah! the girl is right, Ready Rifle," said Kichiamik, laughing, "the daughter of the Crees has not lived in the lodges of the Redskins for nothing. She is also right when she says that Makwah will not come back to-day. He will not come back for a fortnight; does not Ready Rifle see the rain?"

"I understand, Big Beaver," answered Geoffrey, comprehending the allusion, "he has found it raining upon the first time of his coming forth from the hole where he has been hibernating. Therefore he will go back to it for a fortnight—no matter what the weather may be—before he again faces the elements. That is true. And yet, Big Beaver," he continued, smiling, "you are not right in saying that he will not come back to this camp—for Ready Rifle thinks that—he will come back—dead. His den cannot be far from here and his trail will be like a high road through the snow—and also all the snow will be off the top of his hole!"

"Ugh! I understand, we will first give him a little more of Silver Bells' fire-stick, then we will shoot him as he comes out. But Ready Rifle must shoot while Big Beaver pokes in the fire. Big Beaver is no good at shooting Makwah dead when he's charging at close quarters!"

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"I will see to that," said Geoffrey. "Now let us go to Father Antony, he must have had a fright."

A fright, indeed, the good priest had received—but his state of health was now so miserable that he was callous to all else. Nevertheless, he was able to express his gratitude to Silver Bells, whose keen eyesight and presence of mind had thus saved him. No sooner had day dawned than Geoffrey and Big Beaver started off on the bear's trail through the woods. It was, indeed, easy to follow ; they could do so at a run upon their snow-shoes.

They had not gone more than half a mile before they came upon a horrible sight in the bushes. By the side of a fallen log, to which it had been made fast, was a huge steel bear trap, sprung. In that trap was the bone of a man's leg, his skull and the remains of the bones of his body lying scattered around.

Horror-stricken, the hunters examined the gruesome remains.

Big Beaver presently picked up a hunting-knife rusted under the log, where it had been only partly covered by the snow.

After a moment's pause of sad astonishment, the Red-skin uttered one word—a name.

"Piwipikogans—Iron Claws !"

These were the sad remains, it transpired, of an Indian brave who had been missing for two years—a cousin of Big Beaver's. He had, by some sad mischance, stepped into and been caught in his own trap—and died there of starvation, or been discovered by the beast he sought to capture. Possibly he had heard the brute coming just after setting the trap ; when turning round to face it, he had placed his foot upon the plate !

It is an accident which has been known to occur not unfrequently in the backwoods.

The hunters were now more determined than ever to kill the bear, whose hole, with his trail going into it, they discovered but a short distance further on. The huge animal was not long in showing himself, when Big

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Beaver pushed into the mouth of the den a bundle of burning birch bark, mixed up with some damp smoking spruce twigs, after doing which the Redskin instantly placed himself out of the way. With a rush and a roar, Bruin came out straight at Geoffrey who, with cool daring, stood awaiting the charge.

A bullet from the Express, crashing through the brute's brain, instantly laid him at rest for ever, stretched at the hunter's very feet. There was now plenty of fresh meat available and it was much wanted. Rapidly skinning the bear and cutting off with their axes a couple of hams, the hunters hung the remainder of the meat upon a tree, in case an opportunity should occur during the next fortnight of coming back to fetch it. The animal was lean, all the autumn's fat having disappeared during his winter's sleep. The bear nourishes himself, the Indians say, during the period of hibernation by sucking continually first one paw and then the other. Before returning to the little camp upon the promontory, the two hunters removed the leg bone of the unfortunate Iron Claws from the huge steel trap, which they proposed to take with them. They were collecting the unhappy man's bones to place them together under the log and cover them up with branches, when a tinkling sound was heard rapidly approaching. A moment later Silver Bells appeared upon her snow-shoes. She brought with her two sets of the straps which backwoodsmen employ for carrying their packs over the portages, when a canoe has to be carried over land to avoid rapids, which often happens many times in a day's journey up the wilder rivers.

The Indian maid came up gleefully.

"Silver Bells heard the shot, Ready Rifle. She knew the bear would be dead, and so brought the straps to carry the meat. But what are you doing there—a bear trap!—bones?"

The situation was soon explained, much to the girl's sorrow at learning the sad doom of Piwipikogans whom she had known from infancy.

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Long had he been sought for and mourned since he had departed alone in his canoe, although, fortunately, the Redskin who had come to such a miserable end had left neither wife nor family behind him.

With the straps which Silver Bells had so considerately brought, it was easy enough for the men to carry bear meat, skin and steel trap also.

Thus, within an hour, in spite of the light drizzling rain which still continued, all were enjoying an excellent meal off the bear which had sought himself to make one of Father Antony.

Even the huskey dogs were not forgotten, for Silver Bells had brought a small set of straps for herself also. Therefore, after going to view the place where Makwah had been slain, the considerate maiden insisted upon carrying in sufficient of his remains to give the huskies a good feed also. But very fastidious and clean in her person, more after the fashion of the white people than the Indians, she took care so to dispose of the meat in spruce boughs that her attire should not be soiled as she carried it in.

CHAPTER XXV

WILL THE ICE BEAR ?

WHEN the party, having packed up their belongings upon the sleighs, started once more upon the ice, the drizzling rain increased somewhat in intensity. Moreover, there was a heavy mist amounting almost to a fog. As the temperature also had risen considerably, the going soon became extremely heavy, although the snow did not at once turn to slush but balled upon the feet of the dogs and the snow-shoes of the men. The sleighs had now constantly to be stopped to clean the dogs' feet and remove snow which had accumulated upon the front of the runners. In addition to these inconveniences, the fog increased the difficulties of progression. For it became necessary to keep close into the land and follow all the sinuosities of the coast, otherwise it would have been easy to travel in a circle and thus get lost upon the ice. Silver Bells and Miriam now kept their snow-shoes on their feet, being constantly obliged to alight when their sleigh became too clogged up with snow to proceed. Had Geoffrey allowed her to do so, the former would have travelled on foot entirely, but this he would by no means permit. Seeing the trouble constantly increasing, he became all the more anxious for her to husband her strength. That night they were forced, while pitching their tents upon soft, half-melted snow, to camp in rain, which was no longer drizzling but steady, after having accomplished only half the distance of the previous day. The following morning the rain continued, a regular thaw had set in, and the slush now upon the ice was awful. The going was, however,

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better than it had been, as the runners, cutting through the soft slush, now ran upon the ice itself. Thus considerable progress was made although everyone was drenched through, with exception, that is, of Father Antony, who was watched over like a child and never permitted to alight upon the wet ice. Nevertheless, the damp, trying weather was having its pernicious effect upon him. His cough became worse and more frequent, shaking his now thin frame most painfully with its violent paroxysms. Notwithstanding this the priest seemed always cheerful and constantly encouraged the others. By the time that the camp was pitched on the third evening the anxiety of all had become intense. For now great cracks began to appear in the ice, although, fortunately, its thickness and strength did not seem as yet to be affected. Nevertheless, when one sleigh had passed, the two following it often traversed the large cracks which had appeared under the runners of the first one.

Had it only now been possible to have continued the journey by land it would most certainly have been done. Dense forest, however, existed, consisting not only of high trees but low brushwood, through which the sleighs could not have travelled a yard. Every foot of the way traversed would have had to be opened up with the axe. Geoffrey, had he been alone or only with the Indians, might have attempted this—but, with Father Antony in the state he was in, such delay was impossible. Moreover, Big Beaver, who knew this part of the lake, said that about twenty-five miles further on there was a big creek or river flowing in. The sides of this were precipitous and, even if the ice remained sound, which was more than doubtful, the sleighs could not possibly be got across the creek. After this creek was passed, according to Kichiamik, the forest ceased; there being only prairie land interspersed with clumps of willows, over which the sleighs could travel easily upon the thawing snow. The distance on from the big creek to the place of rendezvous, The Point, was only about

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twenty miles. Therefore, if only once that prairie land could be reached in safety, all would go well.

It was an anxious camp that night, but, as the rain ceased, it was fortunately a drier one than that which had preceded it. The first streak of dawn saw the sleighs *en route* once more. Although fine, there was now a strong south wind behind them, while this wind helped the sleighs along, as they travelled through what was now water, free from snow, on the ice, it was dangerous, for the wind was warm. To add to the danger, the sun came out and commenced shining brightly for the first time, with a pleasant warmth that would have been delightful on land. While travelling thus upon ice which was constantly cracking more and more, the effects of both wind and sun were alarming in the extreme. The further the party progressed, the higher did the wind become and the more dangerous the condition of the ice. It was now considered wiser to drive the three sleighs abreast of each other, at a good distance apart, instead of as heretofore, one behind the other. This course was therefore pursued, the ice nevertheless continually making cracks, with reports like a gun, in all directions. A fissure, starting under a sleigh, would now run away out into the middle of the lake, continuing miles away, out of sight—the sound of the detonating report still coming back with a horrid echo. At the same time, other fissures would run, with equal thunderous reports, at right angles to the first-made ones. There was therefore, as the day wore on, not the slightest doubt about the matter, the ice was on the eve of breaking up, already the water was spurting up in places, between the cracks. The question now became one of life and death. Could they, or could they not, reach the mouth of the creek in time? Cruelly now were the whips employed upon the unfortunate dogs and, in their anxiety to travel quicker, while encouraging the huskies with their voices, often did Geoffrey and Big Beaver travel on the sleighs. As for the boys, they were now never on the ice, save when descending to run and

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give a stroke of the whip to the leading dogs. At length, early in the afternoon, there was a joyful cry heard from Big Beaver. Far in the distance he descried appearing the wall or cliff on the far side of the longed-for creek. Every nerve was now on edge, the more so as, the force of the wind constantly increasing, the ice below the sleighs could be felt bending, swaying up and down in the most alarming manner. Full well now recurred to the memory of Geoffrey an old Norfolk saying, "Crack she bear—bend she break." He remembered to have first heard it from the lips of his father, when, as a boy, he was being instructed by the old Squire in the art of skating upon the mere at Thornham.

While the ice had been but cracking indeed, the remembrance of this old saw had served as an encouragement. Now, however; "she" was bending with a vengeance, swinging up and down.

Still all progressed in safety until absolutely opposite the point where, between its high banks, the river debouched into the lake. It was now apparent that some way up the course of the stream a severe thunderstorm was raging. Dark heavy clouds hung over the hills, flashes of lightning were seen, while the oft-repeated sound of distant thunder came reverberating above the howling of the now south-westerly gale. When just off the nearer point of the creek a large volume of muddy water was perceived to be rolling down over the surface of the ice on the river and about to flow out on to that of the lake. Moreover, the ice in the river could be heard breaking up under its weight. Big Beaver, who was with Father Antony on the sleigh nearest the shore, jumped off, ran to the dogs and thrashed them like fury. They crossed the mouth of the river in safety before the rolling flood reached them and a minute later had safely gained the shore. The two boys with the baggage sleigh were furthest out. To them Geoffrey shouted to continue straight on their course and not to attempt to turn into the land until they had got some distance further on. The boys followed his warning, and by so

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doing got safely to land. There remained himself and the two women, and Geoffrey's sleigh was a little behind. He saw the water coming, saw too that it would inevitably reach him before he could get completely across the embouchure of the creek. The ice of the lake itself was already beginning to break up with thunderous roars before its advance, roars indeed louder than those of the distant thunder claps. Realising that it would never bear the sleigh weighted as it was, he stopped. Quick as a flash he, almost by force, pulled Miriam and Silver Bells off the sleigh and told them to run for their lives. Miriam complied instantly, but Silver Bells strove to disobey him and remain.

"Run," he shouted again, and in a voice so terrible, that she too was forced to obey.

They ran, and, even while they crossed in front of the mouth of the creek, the water rolling along, reached them, it almost mounted to their knees! However, they both reached the shore in safety. Then Geoffrey quickly disconnected the harness of the two leading dogs. They ran off splashing through the water over the breaking ice and escaped to the land. The sleigh with the two remaining dogs was now much lighter. Geoffrey turned the head of the dog which had now become the leader out diagonally towards the centre of the lake. Running alongside, he urged the pair onwards. Already he is in the water, it gains upon him—but still the ice bears! He reaches a part where it is stronger; now he turns, he is well past the mouth of the creek and making straight for the shore. A hundred yards, eighty, fifty now only separate him from safety! Then, when only thirty-five remain, the ice all over the lake suddenly breaks up under the weight of the spreading water, assisted by the force of the furious wind. Instantly, with an awful crashing and grinding, huge sheets of thick ice are seen tossing about, piling up one on top of the other, or, mounting up on still unbroken parts, scudding away before the gale. In that awful smash-up, the ice under Geoffrey and his sleigh, which had already

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been heaving up and down like the billows of the sea, suddenly gives way and sinks. Man, dogs and sleigh are momentarily submerged. But they come up again, and both dogs and man clamber on to a large piece of unbroken ice, and across this he urges the dogs. The sleigh floats, but the runners catch against its edge, half mount up it, then stick, and cannot be moved! The man, however, does not desert the dogs. Crawling along the ice to prevent being blown off, he pats them, and, with the aid of his teeth, unfastens their harness. They scramble off, and make for the shore, leaping from one broken piece to another. Geoffrey, unable to spring like them, is left out upon the ice half submerged, with the harness of the dogs and the sleigh. There he crouches and clings tightly to these, determined to save them, for the wind is urging him gradually shorewards. Closer he is driven and closer by slow degrees, but the time is long, very long! His limbs are becoming numbed in that ice-cold water. The ice piling up all around him also prevents him from seeing what is taking place on shore or how far he is from it; soon he almost ceases to feel any sensation. Suddenly a light form dashes to him over the rocking ice flakes. The noose of a long lariat used for binding the packs on to the baggage sleigh is placed around his shoulders by Silver Bells. Without pausing, springing back from one half-sinking ice block to another, as swiftly and lightly as she had come, the daughter of the Crees regains the shore. There Kichiamik, Mirah and the boys are waiting, holding on to the lariat by Silver Bells, they pull—gradually the block of ice, upon which Geoffrey remains holding on to the sleigh harness, moves—it comes in closer, closer. Yet, as they pull, he never lets go of the sleigh harness, for, half senseless as he is with cold, he knows the value of that sleigh load! All the winter's furs are packed upon it. Eventually the block of ice has come as near as it can be drawn. Still partly submerged, it is tightly fixed upon the top of submerged blocks beneath it, thus it

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can come no nearer. Now, working out along the rope upon his hands and knees, goes Big Beaver. He seizes Geoffrey in his strong arms. But Ready Rifle's hands are cramped, they cannot be disentangled from the harness. Still further out crawls the Indian. Taking some of the slack of the lariat with him, he seizes the front of the sleigh with one brawny arm while pulling on to the lariat with the other. A good jerk brings the sleigh right up on to the block of ice. Now all is right ! Crawling back to Geoffrey, he places his arms round him once more, lifts him so that the rough ice will not hurt him, then shouts to Silver Bells and the boys to pull. They do so steadily. Another half minute and Geoffrey is safe on shore and laid close to the fire which Miriam has kindled all ready beforehand in order to thaw his half-frozen limbs thereby.

While Silver Bells, with all the force of which her little body is capable, rubs with might and main at the poor benumbed hands and arms, rubs at them until the fingers relax at length, Big Beaver and the boys disconnect the dog harness from the sleigh and then pull it and all its contents on to the ice-strewn strand.

Then the Redskin, with an air of contentment, came and stood over Geoffrey and the Indian maid, remarking, with a glance of satisfaction and doglike look of attachment,—

“Wah ! wah ! When the black mahingan almost had Big Beaver by the throat Ready Rifle killed him. Big Beaver has not forgotten ! When the cruel grey wolf had Big Beaver's wife, Ready Rifle saved her from the bloody jaws. Big Beaver has not forgotten ! Only when Big Beaver is dead will he forget Ready Rifle ! Now Big Beaver has pulled his friend out of the cold water of the lake, after the maid had carried the rope. It was nothing that was Big Beaver's share. But Big Beaver would pull Ready Rifle out of hell ! For to-day, by his counsel, has not Ready Rifle saved Big Beaver's boys also ? There is no man living, among the white

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men or the Redskins, that has the good heart of Ready Rifle. Ugh ! Big Beaver has spoken !” But Silver Bells, as she remembered how when his arm was sorely wounded Ready Rifle had rubbed her frost-bitten fingers for her, even as she was rubbing his for him now, listened, and looked at Ready Rifle in silence.

CHAPTER XXVI

WABANOU

FORTUNATE indeed was it for all that the afternoon continued fine, the thunderstorm up the creek rumbling away over the mountains in the distance. For everyone being more or less drenched, kits had to be overhauled and a change of clothing brought out. Pots and pans were soon slung over the huge fires that were built up with the quantities of dry logs found lying on the shores of the lake, near the mouth of the creek. Thus, while raiment of all descriptions, and moccasins of men and women, were stuck up on sticks to dry, Geoffrey was able to have and enjoy a hot bath in his tent, the results of which were benefitting in the extreme. For, the habits of the Englishman being strong within him, a portable india-rubber tub was an article without which he never journeyed even in the roughest districts of the backwoods. The women likewise, and even the brawny Redskin, Big Beaver, and his sons, also now enjoyed the luxury of a wash with plenty of hot water. After this refreshing indulgence, life seemed quite a different thing to all the party who had experienced such terribly rough times during their journeyings over the insecure surface of the terrible lake. One of the advantages, as Geoffrey had long since experienced, of the presence of the worthy priest in the camp of the Crees was that he had ever inculcated into their Indian minds the maxim that "Cleanliness is next to Godliness."

Father Antony had found it a difficult matter, in the earlier days of his residence with Kichipinné and his braves, to teach them to keep their camps and their sur-

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roundings clean and tidy, and to care, moreover, for the cleanliness of their own persons. He had, however, by patience and precept combined, at length succeeded even with the older members of the tribe, while the younger ones were born into a different state of things entirely to that which their fathers before them had been accustomed to see in their youth in the lodges of the Crees. Those who know what an Indian encampment is often like can realise the difference to a white man finding himself among cleanly Indians.

Despite the good that he had worked in this one direction, Father Antony often confided to Geoffrey his fears that it was but a thin veneer of civilisation with which he had been able to overlay the natural savagery of the Red Indian. His fears upon that head had greatly to his disgust been principally confirmed upon the occasion when Kichipinné had so complacently remarked that, if Father Antony would not conduct the marriage service for Ready Rifle and Silver Bells the simple marriage rites of the Crees would amply satisfy himself and his people. This relapse into heathen ideas had grieved Father Antony at the time, but, ill as he was, he was determined that a Christian marriage ceremony only should unite his friend to the daughter of the Redskins. Further, he intended to baptize Geoffrey into the Catholic Church upon the morning of the same day which was to see Silver Bells his wife. Father Antony, who had so tenderly been cared for throughout the hard travelling, seemed now to experience considerable relief as he sat as close as possible to the camp-fire. The change in the weather seemed to have braced him up, he appeared quite like himself again as he laughed and joked over the excellent evening meal of bear's flesh which Miriam had served up.

Scarcely had this been completed, and pipes got under way, than a terrific war-whoop filled the air. It was followed by another and another. A moment later, Kichipinné and his braves came running into the camp upon their snow-shoes.

Wabanou

After the first glad greetings, when it was found by the Chief and his followers that the island party was diminished by two of its number, deep indeed was their sorrow. Soaring Swan especially, who had, without mentioning her name, been looking everywhere around for Golden Arrow, was completely crumpled up under the weight of his woe.

By the evening of the following day the reunited party were all comfortably settled down in a neatly-laid-out encampment at The Point. Here they only arrived just in time, for so quickly did the thaw continue that the sleighs were bumping along over bare ground or splashing through pools of water during the last ten miles of the arduous journey.

The central objects, which greeted the eye upon arrival at the camping-ground where Kichipinné and his brethren had passed the winter, were a couple of comfortable log-houses within a stockade. One of these was very much larger than the other, and had, so it appeared, been inhabited by the whole party during the winter. While all save Kichipinné moved out now into newly-constructed teepees, the Chief took his wife and daughter into this house with him. The smaller house had, it appeared, been built for the priest and Geoffrey, who was to take his bride into it after the wedding. If small, it was comfortable, with four good rooms, being indeed far more carefully constructed than was the bigger residence of the Chief. It was easy to see that this erection had been the result of the labour of love of the Indians for Silver Bells, combined with their steadfast admiration for the white chief, Ready Rifle, who was so soon to be admitted one of their family.

It was with great pride that the old slaughterer of the Sioux conducted Father Antony and Geoffrey to their place of abode. Nor could Silver Bells, who modestly followed upon the heels of her betrothed, restrain the happiness of her heart from shining through the light of her eyes

She appeared, in good sooth, so modest and so sweet,

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with her lissom grace of form and feature, that, as he looked at her with pride, Geoffrey found himself making mental comparisons between Silver Bells and some of the white women he had known in the past.

"Supposing," he thought seriously, "that I should, after all, take Silver Bells to England, take her out of the moccasins and garments of the Cree, dress her in Parisian toilettes, with high-heeled boots upon her little feet or in low-necked gown and dainty satin slippers for an evening party. There would not, he could not help acknowledging, be many handsomer than her to be seen. For, if face and figure were perfect, attired as she was now, what would not Silver Bells become when carefully equipped in modern fashion by a first-class *Magasin de Modes*?"

As Geoffrey gazed earnestly at the comely face, which, child of the Redskins as was its owner, was nevertheless no darker than that of many an inhabitant of the South of Europe, upon one point at all events did his mind feel at rest. There was no fear of the owner of those beautiful features ever developing any of the ancestral instincts of the Redskin, the occasional recurrence to savagery which, in her father and his brethren, at times caused such great concern to Father Antony. No, Silver Bells was, thought Geoffrey, by innate grace and bearing, if not as yet by education, fully adapted for the drawing-rooms of civilisation.

Great were the tales of their mutual hunting adventures during the past winter which were related by the braves of the one party to the braves of the other round the camp-fire at night. For many also had been the adventures of the party at The Point. Among other trophies of their hunting excursions which were displayed to the new-comers was a living one, the credit of whose capture was due to Soaring Swan.

So cast down, however, was her brother by his grief at the cruel loss of his young betrothed that he at first refused even to show to Silver Bells and Ready Rifle the creature in question. This was a huge lynx which he

Wabanou

had taken, displaying great courage and daring in the operation, during which he had been severely mauled by the fierce brute. At length, yielding to his sister's insistence, Soaring Swan conducted the pair to a small birch tree behind the big log-house, at the foot of which was a shelter or kennel made of spruce boughs.

"He is in there, Wabanou, the evil spirit, but he won't come out," quoth Soaring Swan. "Wabanou does not like the chain around his wicked neck and bites at it all day long. Do you not hear him, biting the dog chain Soaring Swan put on him?"

They listened and could hear the beast plainly, savagely biting and tearing at the chain.

"Wabanou is hungry; he has had no food for twenty-four hours, because he tried to bite Soaring Swan last feeding-time. Now, perhaps, hunger has made him tamer, Soaring Swan will go and get him a fish." While he was away the huge lynx furtively put out his head. With its green eyes and sharp, erect ears it did indeed look like an evil spirit. In a few minutes the young Cree returned with a large and still half-frozen white fish. He remained standing with it in his hand while he threw several stones in quick succession into the door of the kennel, and, from the fiendish snarls which he provoked, evidently striking and hurting its unfortunate occupant.

Geoffrey, although a hunter and trapper, was yet as humane as any man can be who follows those pursuits and always avoided giving unnecessary pain.

He now was therefore surprised and pained to see Silver Bells laughing merrily, as if at a good joke, when they could hear the stones dumping one after the other on to the body of the unfortunate lynx, whose spittings and growlings soon became ear-splitting.

"Come, Soaring Swan, stop that and feed the lynx," said Geoffrey; "you have thrown enough stones at the brute."

"Others, Ready Rifle, who have not done half the evil that he has, suffer pain besides Wabanou! They too

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have to bear it on their chain from which they are unable to free themselves. Others also are hungry and get no food." With this philosophic remark Soaring Swan, who still had the large white fish by the gills in his left hand, stooped to pick up yet another stone. In doing so, he had slightly miscalculated his distance, and advanced just a trifle too close.

Wabanou was no fool—he saw his opportunity. With a spitting growl, a large body came bounding through the air in a flying leap.

The furry grey mass lit upon the stooping form of the young Redskin, knocking him over. With a savage snarl the lynx seized the white fish in its gleaming white teeth—then, quick as a flash, with one of its paws struck out at Soaring Swan, the cruel claws caught him on the right arm, tearing it down from elbow to wrist. Indeed, even the back of the Indian's hand was torn, so that he dropped the stone. Before he could raise himself from the ground the hungry lynx was back again in his kennel, where he could be heard tearing the fish to pieces. So quickly had Wabanou turned the tables upon his tormentor that Ready Rifle could not now refrain from smiling, as the young Indian cursed "the evil spirit even to the soul of his forefathers."

Silver Bells, however, fearlessly advanced, and, picking up the stone which her brother had dropped, hurled it with precision and strength at Wabanou. It struck him, but though the Indian maiden was well within reach, the poor brute was too famished by far to drop its fish to attack her. He probably knew from previous experiences of tormenting that possibly that fish too might be taken away from him by some means if he left it for one moment. Therefore an angry growl was the sole response to the stone which Silver Bells had thrown.

Geoffrey now in turn advanced and drew back Silver Bells out of reach. She now forgot the

Wabanou

lynx and her sole care was for her brother. Soaring Swan continued vowing vengeance upon the head of Wabanou, as he accompanied his sister to the lodge in order that she might bind up his bleeding arm.

CHAPTER XXVII

A RECEPTIVE MIND

SPRING set in in earnest, and open-air operations were at length possible without the risk of frozen fingers should the bearskin gloves be carelessly for a moment cast aside. During the week after the arrival at The Point, taking advantage of the balmy weather, every one of the skins and furs which had been accumulated since the beginning of the preceding fall was now brought out into the sun to be dried. Moreover, having been frozen all through the winter, most of the skins, of which there were an enormous number, had to be carefully cleaned and roughly cured or tanned to make them marketable.

Without this previous overhauling, the Indians knew that it would be useless to travel up with their parcels of furs to the overseer at the Hudson Bay Post. For that autocrat of the backwoods, upon whose good will the Redskins were solely dependent in those days for guns, powder and shot, salt pork, fat bacon, and flour, clothes, indeed almost every article necessary to maintain life in the wilds, was, they knew, if fair in his dealings, yet a hard taskmaster. Having learned by the traditions of his predecessors for two hundred years past how liable he was to be imposed upon by the needy Redskins, he would, they knew full well, refuse to hand over the coveted objects of barter, in return for the parcels of furs, without carefully undoing each parcel and examining every skin which it contained separately.

That bane of the Hudson Bay Company, the free trader, with his often shoddy wares, had not as yet made

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his way into the wilds to the north and north-west. In every direction therefore, wherever, hundreds of miles apart, there happened to be a Hudson Bay Post, the will of its overseer was law.

Ofttimes, however, man of probity as he was, he carried his life in his hands, among the turbulent and often discontented Indians who thronged to the post with their wares in the spring.

The point towards which the Crees of our history were turning their thoughts was a post, a long way to the north, upon the great Albany River. This stream discharges its waters into James's Bay, to the south of the great inland sea which gives its name to the Hudson's Bay Company. At James's Bay, a district already well known to Geoffrey Digby, there would arrive a ship or ships, in the spring, so soon as the ice should permit of navigation. To these ships would be sent down the furs by canoe to be transported by sea to Montreal on the mighty St Lawrence.

While this overhauling of the furs was going on, the wonderful rapidity with which in Canada the earth resuscitates after the snow was soon apparent. For, in that land of the north, no sooner have the snows disappeared than spring sets in at once, summer treading hot foot upon the heels of spring. Thus immediately vegetation was bursting into life everywhere, the delicate green buds of the larch bursting forth in one direction, the foliage of the willow in another, the leaves springing to life upon the boughs of the dwarf poplars, and the fresh tender shoots relieving the dark green of the spruces and balsams. Under foot the ground became radiant with lovely wild flowers, while issuing from the cracks and crevices of the tree trunks, wherein they had hibernated all through the dark winter, beautiful butterflies now flitted about gaily in the genial beams of the vernal sunshine.

Amid such scenes as this it was that Silver Bells, the daughter of the Crees, was making her preparations for the great mystery of marriage.

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Already had runners been up to the distant Post. Moreover, other Indians, branches of the same family, had come thence bearing sundry packs upon their brawny shoulders, the greater part of whose contents were secrets known only to Miriam and her daughter.

For Kichipinné, chief of a great, if scattered tribe, did not intend that his daughter, whose beauty was so well known among all the Indians of the north, should go to the lodge of Ready Rifle the famous white hunter apparelled like a beggar. No, indeed, his pride was at stake, there should be a great wedding upon this great occasion, and the splendour of Silver Bells should be spoken of with envy by the maidens in the lodges of the Redskins.

Further, although this was much deprecated by Father Antony, and indeed by Geoffrey himself, the eve of the nuptials should—so determined Kichipinné—be celebrated by a great feast. Cunning as he was, however, and fearful of the good Father's remonstrances, Big Partridge, wily Redskin, was careful to keep a secret to himself and his brethren, who secretly chuckled as they looked at each other. For they alone knew the joyful tidings that, carefully concealed in the log-house wherein the Chief resided, there was that which would indeed make the heart of the Indian rejoice upon the great occasion.

By occult means, known only to himself, Crested Crane and Eagle Plumes, a goodly keg of fiery whisky—the fire-water beloved of the Redskins—had arrived thither and was now hidden beneath the flooring. Not even to Soaring Swan had been imparted the good news, lest, in a moment of weakness, that hope of the Chief's family should communicate them to his mother or sister. For, to tell the women would, so argued the Indians, be to tell the priest. Now the priest's unreasoning hatred for the delicious fire-water which makes the heart joyful was a thing well known among the ranks of the Crees. For had not the good Father, usually so reasonable in other matters, once foolishly made it a

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personal matter with the Redskins, that they should decide between his deserting their lodge for ever, or allowing him to destroy the remainder of some bottles of fire-water which were in the camp. Had he not then, although some of the Indians, half drunk at the time, had threatened his life with their rifles if he persisted, himself destroyed the precious liquid? Had he not smashed the bottles before their eyes, without even giving them time to decide upon the momentous question?

That had been in years gone by—Kichipinné was not now going to fall into the error of allowing the priest to know again the joyful secret of their hearts. Not that he could now do anything save make himself disagreeable, in his unreasoning blindness. Of that, however, those in the secret well knew he might be capable. If warned in advance, the Father might even be mean enough to decline to perform the marriage ceremony unless the fire-water were destroyed once more.

In the meantime no drop of the precious liquid had been tasted, no, nor had the mistake been made of so much as removing the cork to smell the delicious fumes of the precious nectar. For Indian as he was, the old enemy of the Sioux knew full well that to allow but one of the braves in the camp, himself included, to delight their nostrils with so much as the aroma of the treat in store would be to spoil all. There would then be no fun at the marriage feast, for all the fire-water would be gone in advance!

While these secrets of state were being so carefully obscured, the condition of Father Antony was in reality far worse than any save himself had any idea of. For he had soon fallen back again after his temporary improvement, and several slight attacks of bleeding from the lungs had warned him that he was not to be long for this world. He had, however, striven to reassure Geoffrey, whose anxiety upon his behalf was great, telling him cheerfully that "a creaking door hangs long."

When the floods of spring had subsided and the pleasant summer days should come, he proposed—please

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God !—to take a journey down the lake and down the Nepigon River, thence to make his way to Port Arthur. Then he would either find a doctor or he would proceed by steamer across Lake Superior to one of the bigger cities upon the American shore. He hoped, he said, that Geoffrey, with his wife, Silver Bells, would take him down in his canoe, especially as there was some business in connection with the printing of the remaining parts of his Indian Bible, in seeing about which he hoped that his friend would be kind enough to assist him. “In any case, Mr Digby,” said Father Antony, “I think that it would be a good thing for you to take little Silver Bells with you for a honeymoon trip to the world of civilisation, and, as the Indians might not like it if they had any idea of my further wishes for your welfare, it would be as well if your taking me to see a medicine man were made the excuse for your departure with your bride. For, my dear Mr Digby,”—here the priest looked round carefully and spoke in a whisper as if anyone overhearing him could understand English—“I have further counsel to give you, or rather advice to offer you. That is, when you have descended the river with Silver Bells never again to ascend its rapids. No matter what you may think now, my friend, you may depend upon it, my words are true, as you grow older you will require in your wife a companion who knows what the word civilisation means. Good, true-hearted girl as is Silver Bells, that she can never learn in the lodges of the Crees. It is not sufficient that she is a Christian ; it is while she is yet young and her naturally quick mind receptive of knowledge that you must take her where that knowledge is to be found.” Here the priest became emphatic. “Remove her beyond the influences of her childhood, more than that, beyond the very atmosphere wherein she now dwells, which is redolent of the inherited influences of her remote ancestry. I will not speak more on this point now, but will leave you to think it over. One other thing, my dear Mr Digby, I wish to speak about. Supposing—and we are in God’s hands

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—that anything should happen to me so that I never more see civilisation myself, then I beg of you, for the sake of our great friendship, that you bear away with you the fruits of the life that you saved. Take my Bible, for my sake have it completed, and after that take such measures as you can for its dissemination to the different missions in Canada, so that through them it may reach the Indians, whose paths in life it may light upon the way to eternal welfare.”

After this—a long speech for him—Father Antony fell back exhausted, while Geoffrey, with tears in his eyes, gripped his emaciated hand and promised his friend that, if life were spared to himself, he would fulfil to the letter his expressed and sacred wishes.

At length the day came which was to precede Geoffrey's admission into the Roman Catholic Church and his marriage.

During the afternoon Geoffrey took Silver Bells for a long paddle on the lake. He wished to be quite alone with this future bride of his, to understand her heart and his own more thoroughly upon this the last day of their freedom. He turned the conversation to religion and, discussing with her the tenets of the faith which he was about to embrace, was delighted to see how much indeed she had learned from good Father Antony. Hers, indeed, he perceived was a receptive mind. He could see that if God were willing he would be able, as the Father had suggested, to bear her away to civilisation and instruct her in its ways, for she would learn. Yes, that gentle soul which was yet so brave was, he perceived, a clean sheet, ready and waiting to receive the impression of knowledge, and that knowledge should be imprinted upon it. He had had one little fear, which, in spite of himself, would at times come springing up disagreeably into his mind. It had come upon the day that Soaring Swan had tormented the captive lynx. Then it had seemed to him somehow that in the callousness of the demeanour of Silver Bells, the manner in which she had laughed at the sufferings of the brute as each stone

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struck it, there had been evidence of the instincts of the savage. These cruel instincts latent within her from untold generations of forest freedom would, he felt, if real, have jarred upon his own sensitive mind so heavily that, even at this the last moment he would have been inclined to break off the marriage. For her sake as well as his own he would wish to spare her the future. How, he thought, could a woman, however brave, however beautiful and true, be happy in a state of civilisation if at heart a savage? How, too, could he, a man with all the refined instincts of a gentleman, ever endure life with one in whom he would always fear to see arise some of the bloodthirstiness of her Cree ancestry?

After his paddle on the lake, however, and his conversation upon religious subjects in the canoe, Geoffrey was quite convinced that he had nothing to fear. It was evident that it had been mere thoughtlessness—girlish ignorance that had made her careless to the sufferings of the lynx.

It was evident that Silver Bells had looked upon the brute merely as a noxious animal that was dangerous, one that had indeed already severely injured her brother, that the girl had never paused to think that the vicious animal could have any feelings. She would not, he knew, have injured a dog. He recalled to mind in fact how she had herself insisted upon carrying the meat for the huskey dogs upon the day that he had killed the hibernating bear.

"No, indeed," he concluded, as he turned the bow of the canoe, paddled slowly homewards, while gazing into her melting eyes, dewy in the rays of the setting sun, across the glowing expanse of the lake, "there is nothing to fear, there is naught about Silver Bells save what is good; she, if Indian, yet is all Christian, without the slightest taint about her of the primeval savage."

CHAPTER XXVIII

HOME NEWS

UPON landing from the canoe at The Point, while Silver Bells retired to the log-house, Geoffrey, after carrying the canoe well up on to the strand, strolled off in the direction of the camp-fire. Here he found present a mixed group of Swampy and Stony Indians, who had arrived while he was out upon the lake with Silver Bells. All seemed very much pleased at meeting the famous Ready Rifle, while one of the group he had already met. This was a particularly ill-favoured mortal, a Swampy Indian who rejoiced in the euphonious appellation of Croaking Bull-Frog. Despite his flat head and narrow eyes, Croaking Bull-Frog was devoted to Ready Rifle, who had once done him one of those services in time of danger for which his name was so renowned among the Redskins. He was therefore now proud to greet the white man before his fellows. Moreover, to display before the admiring onlookers the intimacy of the connection which existed between himself and the great man, the Swampy Indian drew forth with much ceremony a roll of birch bark from the bosom of his shirt. This, he said, contained a letter for Ready Rifle. It had been brought by Joe Wilson, the half-breed, to the Hudson Bay Post from James's Bay, and Wilson, knowing that he could rely upon Croaking Bull-Frog to deliver it safely, had entrusted it to him.

Thanking the Indian warmly, Geoffrey took him with him to his lodge where, to the great delight of the Swampy, he presented him with a most serviceable pocket-knife and a roll of tobacco. Not wishing to show

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impoliteness to his guest, Ready Rifle did not at once dismiss him and examine his letter—on the contrary, he, with some ceremony, inquired of his welfare and his family, of his success in trapping and many other details concerning himself, which the Indian was only too delighted to give at length.

Indeed the Swampy, once he was started, did not seem to wish to stop talking ; accordingly, after describing in detail his meeting with Joe Wilson at the Post, where he had left him, he inflicted upon Geoffrey the additional details of every step of the trail by which he had travelled from the Post, which, it seemed, presented considerable difficulties.

Geoffrey was a good listener. Moreover, these details, so carefully laid bare by one friendly to himself, might, he thought, come in useful before long. He listened particularly carefully, moreover, when the Swampy Indian, in whose nature more than the usual cunning predominated, confided to his friend, Ready Rifle, a secret which he thought might prove to his advantage in getting ahead of his fellow hunters and trappers.

This secret consisted of a trail known only to himself, by following which Ready Rifle might reach the Hudson Bay Post on the Albany two days before the rest of his party. By this means he would, so Croaking Bull-Frog pointed out, be able to display his own furs first to the overseer, and thus get a better price than those coming after him ; a quite legitimate scheme, according to the ethics of the Swampy brave.

“By to-morrow’s sunset,” quoth the Redskin, “Ready Rifle will have a wife to carry his pack for him. Let him then take her on the following morn early in a canoe along the north shore of the lake, travelling westward to the second little point of land. There he can land his squaw, with her pack and the camp outfit. Then let Ready Rifle paddle back alone to the first point, haul up his canoe there, and leave it turned upside down in the ordinary manner. That is the place where the usual trail to the post starts from. Now let Ready Rifle walk

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back again and join his wife at the second point, keeping well in the edge of the water, and being careful to leave no trail in the sand. None now will ever suspect that he has followed any other trail than the usual one leading to the Albany River."

The Swampy's further instructions were that the bed of a small creek was to be followed, again, if possible, by walking in the water for a long way while it wound through a cotton-wood copse, much frequented by fool-hen partridge, pine grouse and prairie chickens. After this, by following three tall cotton-wood trees in a line the crest of a high hill would be reached. Below this hill there would be level prairie land. Beyond the prairie, at the end of an hour's journey, the hunter would come to the first of a small chain of lakes. On the margin of the first one, the Indian told Geoffrey, he would find a birch-bark canoe concealed under some spruces. For, the Swampy explained, he was in the habit, in the spring and fall, of visiting these lakes to shoot ducks, which came there in great numbers. The place was known, he believed, to himself alone, and he always kept a canoe hidden either at one end or the other. His friend, Ready Rifle, was, he said, welcome to use it, and might leave it hidden again at the far end. Thence the trail onwards could be followed by the occasional blazed trees, leading in a north-easterly direction for a day's journey, and so on.

It was all most explicit and interesting, had Geoffrey been likely to require the information. This, with an inward smile, he felt that he would not at anyrate be likely to make use of for any purposes unknown to his Cree comrades. At length the Swampy left him, when Geoffrey untied the little package of birch bark which he had had delivered into his hands.

As the outer covering fell to the ground, Geoffrey held in his hand a bulky envelope addressed in the formerly well-known hand of Geraldine McGeorge. It was long now since those firmly-traced but elegant characters had met his eye. Geoffrey Digby, Esq., c/o the Hudson Bay

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Company, James's Bay, Canada—thus ran the superscription. He looked at the post-mark—it was a London one. The letter had been posted at the Down Street Office in the previous December. In spite of the time, nearly half a year, which had elapsed since the letter had been despatched, a sweet savour faintly invaded his nostrils as he held it in his hand. Geoffrey raised it—it seemed to convey to him the delicate aroma he had often perceived while passing by Rimmel's shop. It was perfumed with white violet essence, and thus brought with it a whiff of civilisation to the man who, living among the Redskins, was to be married on the morrow to the daughter of a Redskin.

In spite of himself, as Geoffrey sat there irresolute, holding the letter in his hand, his mind became invaded with violent sensations ; he could not help thinking of the contrast between the owner of the jewelled hand which had penned that epistle and the maiden whom he was about to marry ! It was impossible for him to avoid drawing also a mental comparison, of the living, breathing, noisy London in which that address had been penned and the vast expanse of the inland sea on the one hand, and the eternal forests on the other, of the rude log-hut where he was. For a few minutes he almost resolved not to open the letter ; he did not wish to have yet more forcibly impressed upon his mind the difference there was between the Geoffrey Digby of old and the Ready Rifle of to-day. What had civilisation got to do with him ? Had he not elected to become a consort of the Crees ? Was he not already almost as good as a Cree himself ?

With these ideas in his head, Geoffrey was about to destroy the letter unread when he heard Father Antony coughing in the adjoining room. Instantly he thought, that, were he to tell the Father of his scruples, the good man would cynically laugh at and reprove him for his cowardice. This decided him—it was probably his duty to see what tidings had been sent across the great black water. Taking his hunting-knife from its socket on

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the belt that he wore, Geoffrey inserted the point and carefully cut open the envelope. Two pages of writing, a Christmas card and a photograph were its contents. He looked at the card first. Robins, a church tower covered with snow, and a branch of green holly covered with red berries. Around it the legend, "A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year." Laying this down with a half sigh, the hunter next examined the photograph. Geraldine McGeorge, looking as handsome as ever and attired in fashionable mourning. He did not see much difference in her now from the days when he had rescued her from a watery grave off the coast of Newfoundland. It was a nice portrait, lady-like; in fact Geraldine looked what she was—a well-bred woman. The letter, which was dated from Curzon Street, Mayfair, ran as follows:—

"MY DEAR GEOFFREY,—It is almost with diffidence that I sit down to write to you once again, when over two years have elapsed since you last honoured me with a line. And yet somehow I feel impelled to do so this Christmastide, for are we not taught above all else to act in a forgiving spirit at this time of the year? Again, another feeling pervades my whole being and shocks me as it strikes me with its dreadful possibility. What if the man to whom I am writing should no longer be in the land of the living, but have already journeyed in the ferry-boat of Charon across the dreaded waters of the Styx. Forgive me for these gruesome thoughts, if this letter should find you, as I trust it may, alive and well. In that case, you will smile at my fears, but you will at all events in justice admit that they are perfectly reasonable. For how can your true friends—those who really care for you and who in the midst of the turmoil of the world often find your memory come stealing across the brain, help being alarmed as the months and years roll by and no sign comes from you? All that we know of you is from some occasional paragraph in a Quebec or Montreal paper sent to us by our friends,

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wherein there is mention of some wonderful adventure, some hair-breadth escape of 'Mr Digby, the white hunter who is known among the Indians by the soubriquet of Ready Rifle.' Several such as these have I received since my poor husband died and I came back to England, and in each I have been proud to see that, as usual, your manly courage and cool-headedness has been exerted not for yourself but for others. Oh! Geoffrey, do you think that I can ever forget those long hours when you buoyed me up in the sea, when in the waves you whispered words of encouragement into my ear, until at the last we were both picked out of the dreadful salt water by my own brother. I often lie back and close my eyes now when it all comes back to me—the great rolling waves and, above all, the fog. And then I remember your words, 'Strike for the Union Jack,' and so we struck for it—and I, at all events, am alive to-day to tell the tale, and I pray and hope that you may be also. Then again, I think of that noble priest, Father Antony, with whom, at his suggestion, I mingled my prayers at your bedside in the Admiral's cabin, when our prayers were answered. I have been a Christian ever since, and wish most earnestly that I could see the good priest once more to tell him so, and that I often think of him. For, upon that occasion, Geoffrey, I learned to realise the efficacy of prayer, and, therefore, never since have I ceased to pray for your welfare and for his. Having done so earnestly, with a true heart, I cannot but think after all that you will be spared from all the dangers among which you live, and have lived for so long, to come home once more and gladden your old and sincere friends with the sight of your presence.

"Should you ever get this letter, I think that you will agree with me that there is an additional reason for your coming to England, when I tell you about your parents. Since the marriage of your sister Grace, she and I have become great friends, and at her request I went down with her to see Thornham, your old home, last spring, when we found both your father and mother

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ill. While I was there, your poor mother was struck down with paralysis in the right side. As Grace with her little girl had to rejoin her husband in Scotland, I stopped at Thornham for a month or two and endeavoured to replace her with your mother, who is a dear old lady, and so patient under her afflictions that my heart simply goes out to her in her sorrow. Your father has suffered terrible agonies from gout. He can no longer ride at all, and his greatest grief has been having to give up the hounds, of which Sir Lionel Lowby, of Rendlesham, has assumed the Mastership. The gout seems to have affected his eyesight, so as he can neither ride nor read, you can imagine, my dear Geoffrey, what a misery life has become for him ! He so often says that he wishes that 'that roaming dog Geoffrey would come home once more, to see the old Squire before he dies.' And do you know that I well understand the deep feeling of longing which underlies this apparently casual remark ? I find him singularly like you, and especially does his voice remind me of yours. As for your mother, she always has by the side of her couch a little miniature there is in an oval frame, which used, she says, to be exactly like you as a boy. She often looks at this miniature and then says with a sigh, 'I wonder if I shall ever see my poor boy again.' I know of course what she means by calling you her 'poor boy,' for I have even seen that woman who behaved to you so cruelly. Grace pointed her out to me in the Row this summer. She was walking with Lord Middlesborough, which is not, by-the-bye, at all calculated to improve her reputation ; for even you, in your backwoods, must have heard at times a breath of the terrible scandals of which that scapegrace young nobleman has been the hero ? Be that as it may, she seemed to me to have a hard and hungry look upon her face and, in spite of the virtues of Christian charity, which I learned from Father Antony, I could not find it in me to do anything else than join with your sister Grace in hating her, for sending you off to spend the whole of your life in the

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backwoods. Now, I don't know what more I have to tell you. I send you my photo. Do you think it like me? I have none of you, except an old one which Grace gave me, and it is not very like you. My life is very quiet since I came to live in Curzon Street, and although people are fond of giving it out that I am about to be married again, there is not the very remotest truth in the report. I fancy it has come about simply because that stupid boy, young Conway, who has become a sort of tame cat about the house here since he succeeded his uncle in the baronetcy and left the Navy, openly declares, just for fun, that I must either be his sister or 'something else.' But it will of course never be the 'something else,' and I shall therefore always be able to sign myself as I do now.—Your true and affectionate friend,

“GERALDINE McGEORGE.”

CHAPTER XXIX

THE EVE OF THE WEDDING

HAVING read his letter, Geoffrey did not pause to ponder on its contents, but went in to Father Antony to communicate to him so much of it as concerned himself. The priest was immensely delighted that Lady McGeorge should have remembered him. He in turn spoke most highly of her, reminding Geoffrey that if it had not been for that lady's absolute devotion to himself it was more than probable that he would not now have been in the land of the living. He seemed to like to talk about Geraldine and to dwell upon her memory. Asking for her photograph, he sat with it in his hand, contemplating it with pleasure. Father Antony did not, however, now that he knew that it was impossible, commit the breach of good taste of referring to his formerly expressed aspiration, that Lady McGeorge might become the wife of Geoffrey Digby. What he did say, however, as he sat with her photograph in his hand, was,—

“My dear Mr Digby, that is a fine woman, one fit to shine in any society, as well as being a most worthy woman. Should you ever see her again, after I am dead and gone, tell her, I pray, that I offered up prayers for her welfare in my latter days, while blessing that Providence which mercifully permitted me to be the humble agent to rescue her from the spirit of infidelity and atheism of the age. Say to her, that it was a great happiness to Father Antony that he lived long enough to hear her kind words read to him thousands of miles away in the backwoods, that indeed he was pleased and cheered at the breath of civilisation and Christianity thus

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wafted to him among the savages, with whom he feared that he had spent too much of his life in vain."

After this, the good man was seized with an attack of the cough, which was most trying to witness, so much did he suffer. When he had recovered from the exhaustion that it caused him, he whispered, rather than said, to Geoffrey,—

"My dear Mr Digby, do not forget what I told you. Take Silver Bells away from here, and, if I am not well enough to go down the river with you both, then contrive to go without me. Try and teach her to be like this woman, whose photograph, if you will allow me, I will keep here in my room for the present, as that of a true convert. It might, in any case, be as well that Silver Bells should not see this lady's picture in your possession. She might not understand the freedom of our civilised ways, and be therefore unable to comprehend why you should have received it."

While Father Antony was speaking, a tinkling sound without announced the approach of Silver Bells herself. Her knock was heard at the door. "Pintigen," answered the priest, and a moment later Silver Bells stood in the room. She was shy—for her attire created, as she evidently expected it would, some sensation. While upon her feet were new and neatly moulded moccasins, inlaid with bead-work, upon which there tinkled as she moved her silver bells, she wore over her shoulders a bright crimson shawl. Her hands were encased in moose-skin gloves worked with beads, while around her waist she wore a belt of beads of the most exquisite workmanship. The patterns and colours were tastefully harmonised, and in the belt was placed an ancient scalping knife, with handle of a curious design. To crown her head was a circlet of ermine skin fastened round the forehead, sewn into which was a row of broad and high feathers, white and crimson ones coming alternately. In her ears she wore large circular earrings of golden filagree work. They were highly ornamental, and she was very beautiful herself in her brilliantly

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striking costume, yet it was with the beauty of the young savage, her eyes glittered like stars. As she stood there in the middle of the room, modestly waiting to be admired, neither Father Antony nor Geoffrey, who was breathless at her striking appearance, could help casting a glance at the photograph that the Father held in his hand. Silver Bell's curiosity was aroused. She bounded towards the picture and laid a finger upon it. "What is that, my Father? Silver Bells has never seen that picture before."

"It came to-day, Silver Bells. It is the picture of one whom, by the grace of God, I was enabled to rescue from a state nearly approaching to heathendom. I feel to her as though she were my daughter in the Lord."

"Oh! she is beautiful, but her clothes are strange. But will not Ready Rifle and my Father now look upon Silver Bells? Is she not also beautiful to-night?" Like a child with a new toy the Indian maid walked round the room, her bells jingling louder than usual as she placed down each foot in succession with an emphasis, as though in some kind of dance.

"Yes, you are very beautiful, Silver Bells," said Geoffrey; "but why have you got on these pretty feathers to-night?"

"It is the ancient Cree head-dress, Ready Rifle. My Father, Kichipinné, made it for Silver Bells as a surprise. He knew that Ready Rifle would be pleased to see her made so beautiful. It is for the first time in her life," she concluded, modestly smiling at her betrothed. As for him, he could not, if he would, restrain his admiration of her appearance, but neither could he, if he would, prevent himself from inwardly making comparisons with the portrait.

Father Antony guardedly said nothing; he had it not in his heart to reprove his almost daughter for this relapse into the attire of her savage ancestors, but he could not commend.

Silver Bells was, however, quite contented with the praise of her lover, and now playfully bid him to come

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out to the feast which Kichipinné had prepared. She also asked the Father prettily if he would feel well enough to come also.

"No, my daughter, I am not well enough to come," replied Father Antony, "for I must reserve my strength for to-morrow's ceremony. However, I will give you my blessing before you go. Kneel down, my daughter."

The Indian maid knelt down before the good priest, while he, rising, pronounced a *benedicite* over her head.

The incident, so Geoffrey thought, formed a picturesque tableau, with the girl's bowed head attired thus with white and crimson feathers. It was like some old picture of the baptism of Pocahontas.

As the girl rose from her knees, Father Antony drew her to him and embraced her solemnly upon the forehead. "Go! Anna Maria, go, my daughter, and may you never forget that you are a Christian woman!"

As Geoffrey turned to follow her, Father Antony called him back and silently held out to him his hand.

What the two men said to each other by their eyes, as their honest hands clasped each other, none but their hearts could tell.

Yet did each know right well what was passing in the other's mind—knew also that the thoughts of each were better left unexpressed.

When Geoffrey, whom Silver Bells was leading by the hand, had got outside into the darkness of the night, he heard the sound of music and merriment, borne upon the breeze from the direction of the huge camp-fire, whose flames reddened the sky. As they drew nearer, the sounds of the accordion and violin grew more distinct. This did not surprise him, since it was nothing new to him to learn with what facility the North-American Indian has learned to play upon these instruments, and, moreover, to play in time and tune. What did, however, surprise him, and strike him as highly incongruous, was the attire of the performers upon the fiddle and concertina. For, as there merrily rang out

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the inspiring strains of that well-known song of the Civil War, "As we go marching through Georgia," those who produced them were, he now observed, attired in full war-paint and feathers. One of them, he with the violin, was his friend the Swampy Indian. The other, with the accordion, was none other than Soaring Swan.

They were seated upon a rough bench, with their backs partly turned towards the new-comers. Beyond them, however, seated upon the ground in the full blaze of the camp-fire, was a group of Indians joining in a chorus of an Indian translation of the song. So travestied were all that, as the plumes upon their heads nodded fiercely in time to the tune, Geoffrey could not recognise them.

The Redskins who sat thus singing wore red blankets over their bare shoulders, while a belt of wampum held up the deer-skin breeches. Each one had a crest of eagle feathers on his head, and all were painted upon face and chest, being daubed with red and yellow ochre.

As he paused in the shade, the better to take in this fierce and extraordinary scene, Geoffrey felt the little hand he held press his with a gentle tension.

"Is not the old war dress of the Crees magnificent?" murmured Silver Bells. "Kichipinné and all the assembled braves have assumed it to-night in honour of Ready Rifle. It is a surprise."

"A surprise indeed, Silver Bells, like those feathers in your hair. I never saw the war-dress of the Crees before. It is," he paused for a word—"impressive in the extreme."

"It impressed the Sioux the last time Kichipinné led his braves upon the warpath," replied Silver Bells, smiling proudly, "so much that few of their warriors ever lived to face the Crees again. Miriam, the mother of Silver Bells, and the other squaws have told Silver Bells how the Sioux fled like sheep before the waving plumes. Ay, and how even the women struck them down and

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scalped them—the dogs ! I would that Silver Bells had been there to see.”

The firelight at that moment shone with an extra glow as a heap of dry fuel was thrown upon the blaze. Geoffrey caught, therefore, the expression upon the face of Silver Bells as she fiercely uttered these words. He noticed that she clenched her little white teeth together as though she too would have willingly joined in striking down the foes of her race, the flying Sioux.

Just at this moment a fearful war-whoop rent the air of night. It came from the throat of Kichipinné. The Chief of the Crees looked at least eight feet high as, bounding to his feet, he uttered this awesome cry of welcome, instantly causing the merry strains to cease. All of the other Redskins rose to their feet, likewise with war-whoops, and then the painted warriors came crowding round the white man and the Indian maiden as they stood there hand in hand.

“Welcome ! Ready Rifle, to the teepees of the Redskins,” quoth the Chief, cordially extending a hand. “Welcome thou, before whose feet the green-eyed evildoers of the forest flee like fishes, welcome the trail which led thy footsteps to the lodges of the Crees. Welcome, Ready Rifle, was the day that first thy shadow fell before the wigwam of the daughter of Kichipinné. Welcome the morrow’s morn which shall see Silver Bells thy bride, when the maiden, obedient, shall follow thy footsteps to thy lodge.”

After this exordium and handshaking from the Chief, Geoffrey had to submit to other poetical periods of welcome and solemn handshakings from each of the braves in succession. After the braves, the squaws came forward one by one, each with a speech and words of welcome. During this ceremony Silver Bells, to whom none addressed a word, stood proudly, straight as a dart, by the side of Ready Rifle, whose left hand she had taken.

It was an awesome and an impressive ceremony, and during its continuance Geoffrey Digby, brave man as he

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was, could scarce repress a shudder as he beheld all these fierce visages and thought what scant mercy they would deal out were he an enemy instead of an honoured friend.

Not much time, however, was allowed him for thought, for he was led away by the braves to the camp-fire, where the meats for the feast were awaiting in the huge kettles swinging over the flames.

Now all the braves were seated, the women serving them most copiously, Silver Bells respectfully standing behind her betrothed and waiting upon him.

Only when sufficient honour had been done to their guest did Kichipinné, at the request of Ready Rifle, permit of the squaws seating themselves and taking their meal in turn.

Meanwhile, to the inward horror of Geoffrey, the fire-water had been produced, its contents having been poured from the keg into pails fashioned out of birch bark. It was now drawn thence with neat little cups made of the same material.

It was not long before the fumes of the fiery liquor began to take effect upon the Indians, who speedily became noisy and wild in their manner. Even the one cupful which was forced upon Geoffrey mounted swiftly to his head, although he was careful not to swallow more than half of its contents. The women now began also to bring cups of birch bark, for drink for themselves, when, to his great distress, Geoffrey observed Miriam insisting upon Silver Bells partaking of some of the deadly poison so fatal to all of the Redskin race.

Shortly after the scene around the camp-fire became one of the wildest orgie. How it began Geoffrey never exactly knew, but soon the half-drunken Indians had commenced a furious war dance.

In this, with loud shouts and fierce stampings, they waved axes and rifles, and began even to fire the latter off into the air.

At times the Indians went through the actions of

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killing and scalping a fallen foe, then occasionally they joined hands and madly pranced around the camp-fire. After a while the women, who at first had kept respectfully aloof, joined in the wild dancing, yelling out terrifying war-whoops. Having, moreover, got hold of the paint pot, the squaws now painted themselves, to Geoffrey's infinite disgust. Even Silver Bells now appeared with a splash of red paint upon each cheek and brandishing her scalping-knife. As the cups circulated more quickly the scene became even yet wilder, the ancient war scenes with the Sioux being re-enacted with terrible realism for Geoffrey's entertainment. In the midst of this pandemonium, Soaring Swan suddenly bethought him of Wabanou, the lynx. Calling to his sister, Silver Bells, to accompany him, and to bring a torch of birch bark, they dashed off together. Geoffrey, impelled magnetically to watch the actions of her who was in a few short hours to become his bride and companion for life, followed, although unable just then to free himself of the drunken attentions of Croaking Bull-Frog, who went also to witness, as it happened, a bloody scene.

While Silver Bells held up the torch, to give light to her half-drunken brother, the young Indian, with fierce cries, first called upon Wabanou to come out and fight him. As the lynx failed to respond to the invitation, the young brave resorted to more drastic measures. After dancing a few wild steps and cursing the animal for a lily-livered Sioux, Soaring Swan suddenly made a dash at the wild beast's kennel. Like a wild beast himself, he seized its chain and dragged forth the fierce creature, which then indeed soon justified its appellation of Wabanou, the spirit of evil. During the combat which ensued it was for a time impossible to distinguish the yelling wild Indian from the great snarling wild cat as they rolled over together with furious struggles upon the ground. At length, however, Soaring Swan contrived to deal a ferocious blow with his tomahawk which disabled the beast, when, rising all covered with blood but screaming with laughter, in

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which Silver Bells joined, he called to his sister to approach with the torch. He now cut off each of the still living and growling animal's paws in succession, when suddenly Silver Bells rushed in with her scalping knife. Apostrophising the beast as "Spawn of a Sioux," she stabbed it repeatedly in the throat. Giving then the torch into her brother's bleeding hands, and acting like a crazy woman, the girl in a moment commenced removing the scalp of the lynx, which she did swiftly and adroitly. When the whole mask of the panther-like cat had been removed, casting off her head-dress of feathers, Silver Bells, to the delight of her brother and the Swampy Indian, fitted the still bleeding skin upon her own shapely head. The girl now seemed some she-devil—the two sharp pointed ears, sticking up, looking indeed like the ears of a demon or satyr.

Having completed this horrible travesty of herself, Silver Bells, holding her brother by one hand and her reeking scalping-knife in the other, came and danced wildly before Geoffrey. He, in his anger, felt as if he could have struck her down and killed her on the spot. He would far rather have seen Silver Bells lying stretched there dead than have had to suffer such a terrible disillusion. Fortunately, just at this moment, Kichipinné, partly drunk and dancing hand in hand with Big Beaver, came to find Geoffrey, to tell him that the priest was very ill. They had apparently been to see him and in that condition! No wonder if Father Antony were very ill! As Geoffrey hurried off to attend to the good Father, he found himself unable to shake off either Silver Bells or her brother, who insisted upon ceremoniously conducting Ready Rifle, for in her wildest moment the Indian maiden still showed submissive deference to her betrothed. Even did they follow him into Father Antony's very presence. There, however, the priest's appearance, for he was pale as death, having burst a blood-vessel, terrified the pair, so that they became subdued and instantly retired. Not, however, before they, or, at all events, Silver Bells, had seen and

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noted the dying priest's sternly reproving and reproachful look. The girl, conscience-stricken, remembered the Father's last words to her! Her excitement vanished, she tore the lynx scalp from her head and dashed out into the night. Soaring Swan, upon whom the priest's appearance had created an unpleasant sensation, went to obtain more drink, where the appalling yells of the remaining Indians announced that they had reached a state of madness.

Meanwhile Geoffrey, having closed the door and secured it, sat down by Father Antony's side.

He took the feeble hand in his own and remained sadly speechless. The priest, however, spoke, in a feeble voice, in jerks,—

“My son!—they have killed me—I can never marry you to Silver Bells. But—my death will be a blessing to you. It is by God's will that I die—now—Flee from her!” He paused a long time with closed eyes, until a very, very faint grip of the hand told Geoffrey that Father Antony was still alive. Suddenly he opened his eyes wide and spoke with a strong voice, loudly, “Flee!” After that one word the light all went out of the priest's eyes. He gave a long rattling gasp. Father Antony was dead.

CHAPTER XXX

WITHOUT A COMPASS

GEOFFREY sat a while in silence after he became convinced that his good friend, whose tones he had heard but a few minutes before, addressed with clear, reasoning power to himself, had left him for ever—left him alone. He crossed the dead priest's hands upon his breast and laid his crucifix upon them—then he strove to think—to realise the situation and what it meant to himself.

Thought, however, became impossible to him, with that wild pandemonium without.

As he heard the continuance of the shots and the savage yells, joined to which were the furious howlings of the alarmed huskey dogs, a rage of indignation suddenly swept across the young hunter's powerful frame. The sacred presence of death should be no longer thus desecrated, he would put an end to the shameful riot!

Geoffrey sprang to his feet, seized his rifle and went out swiftly, with he knew not what intentions in his heart. Immediately outside the door of the log hut he came in violent contact with a crouching figure. Thinking it one of the drunken Indians, with an oath, Geoffrey seized the figure by the shoulder and jerked it to its feet. The moon shone out at that instant brightly and he saw that it was Silver Bells, now modestly dressed in her ordinary attire. Gone was her crimson cloak, gone the red paint, the blood of the lynx from her face, gone too the beaded belt, likewise the

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golden earrings. Moreover, the maid was weeping bitterly.

Instantly Geoffrey felt in a softened mood, his heart was touched. Placing his rifle against the doorway, he spoke in suppressed tones. "Silver Bells, our dear friend—he who was almost a father to you—is dead; those savages have killed him. Come in and see how peaceful the good man looks."

With an exclamation of terror, the Indian maid realised the loss she had sustained. Entering the apartment, she threw herself upon her knees beside the dead man's couch, while the tears now fell freely. Full of remorse was the gentle heart of the Indian maid as she recalled to memory the priest's reproving and reproachful look when he was still living, not an hour ago! Savage! she knew indeed she had been herself, and yet how often, since the days of her early childhood, had not the good man by whose corpse she now knelt warned her against yielding to what he called "her inherited savage instincts." And now he who had taught her all that she knew which was pure and good, was gone from her for ever—had left her, thinking badly of her at the last! She had indeed cause for tears! It was typical of the nature of Silver Bells that she, who had a heart so strongly capable of loving, did not at this juncture think at all of herself, of the fact that, the priest being dead, she could not marry Ready Rifle, or at all events not do so according to the Christian rites. She only thought of the good man himself. She reverently touched his hands and face—they were not yet cold. How short a time it was since, with the word *benedicite*, he had, then himself a moving, sentient being, placed those long, slender fingers upon her head. And those lips too! they had such a short while ago bade her to be a Christian woman, and pressed her forehead, and now they were mute for ever! Where now was gone the soul which had prompted those words addressed to herself? It was the first time that the young Indian girl found herself face to face with the

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problem of death and the hereafter, in the case of one whom she loved and respected deeply. Yet, all the while that she knelt there, she was conscious of the disturbance going on without, conscious, too, that Ready Rifle, the one other man whom she loved and respected, must be condemning not only her wild, savage people, but also herself, for having acted as wildly and savagely as they.

Looking up from her knees, she looked at Geoffrey's handsome features. There was an air of immense melancholy, of intense gloom overspreading them. Oh ! how unhappy he looked ! What a weight of woe overshadowed his brow ! Rising, she came over to him timidly,—

“Silver Bells cannot demand pardon from the dead ; to-night she also fears to demand it from the living.”

Seeing her still remaining humbly before him, Geoffrey presently embraced her, and there was a forgiving tenderness in his embrace. It seemed to Silver Bells almost as though there might be condonation in that kiss, certainly his love had not been killed for her entirely. And yet she felt somehow as though he were holding her a long way apart from him. Now, Silver Bells,” said Geoffrey, “leave me and retire to your couch, I must remain here alone to think. Stay—before you retire, if those brutes are fit to speak to, tell them of our sad loss ; moreover, tell them to moderate the disturbance they are making in the presence of the dead.”

After a long parting glance of sadness at the dead Father and a long deprecating glance at the living man, whose brow still remained knitted and perplexed in deep thought, Silver Bells went out quietly, the tinkling of her anklets slowly fading away into the distance.

When Geoffrey was alone, he still found a difficulty in concentrating his thoughts ; at last, however, he did so. As, in spite of the message he had sent to the rioters, the shouting and shooting still continued, he came to a determination. This was, that never should

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the hand of one of these howling Redskins touch and desecrate the body of his dead friend. He himself would bear him away and bury him alone. He would bear him away in his canoe that very night. Fortunately he had brought up his own canoe upon one of the sleighs, when it had been filled with baggage, therefore now he was independent. Further, so strongly did Geoffrey feel that it would be necessary that he should be alone for awhile, in order that his poor tired brain might have a rest to consider future action, that he determined, after burying his friend, to absent himself from the camp of the Indians for a time. Thus he could think out matters—consider what to do about Silver Bells. Were he to remain now at the camp, he knew that he would be forcibly married to the Indian maiden upon the morrow, according to the Cree rites, which amounted to nothing at all from a Christian point of view. He did not wish to leave Silver Bells altogether, but he could not at the moment make up his mind to this other course; and had not Father Antony, now lying there so placid, almost shouted out to him the last word he had ever spoken in life? “Flee!” he had said—then died. Had he not also said, “It is by God’s will that I die now, so that I may not marry you?” Surely, it seemed to Geoffrey, he must go somewhere alone and think all this over—think over also the letter which he had received from Geraldine McGeorge. There was so much to think about—this terrible development of the savage latent in Silver Bells, more than all. He might, he felt, have known that it had been there always; but now that he knew for certain that it was so, he merely felt sorry—ininitely sorry for this poor child of the woods. He did not feel any anger, whatever he might have experienced at the time when he had seen her scalp the lynx and dance before him. Even that action, Geoffrey now reflected, had been innocently done to please him, to amuse him. The whole horrible feast and war-dance had been in his honour, and his intended bride had but endeavoured to perform her part in it. Still he pondered, would he, now that he knew so much

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more than before of what she might be capable, ever be justified in taking Silver Bells home with him to Thornham, to visit his father and mother—both ill and old? Would not she, the child of the Crees, be miserable herself? Would not, moreover, the old people die of the shock of her appearance?

Oh! there was so much to think of! and all the while that yelling and shouting, those terrifying war-whoops. They were, however, becoming less frequent as the crested and painted warriors were evidently falling off to sleep. Soon every one of them, absolutely dead drunk, would sink into a stupor from which they would not awaken for many hours. Possibly some of them would die in it, of alcoholic poisoning. Geoffrey had seen Indians drink before, he knew what might happen.

His determination to leave, being made, was soon carried out. Geoffrey had often been alone in the woods without a tent, and had a regular camp outfit which he could strap upon his back. His canoe was but a few yards away. He walked to it openly and loaded up all the things he would want—they were but little, with exception of a shovel, an axe, a gun, a rifle, and the unprinted part of Father Antony's manuscript of the Indian Bible. Then, having wrapped up Father Antony's body in a Hudson Bay blue flannel blanket, he sewed him in it for a shroud. Then he carried the corpse, which was still limp, to his canoe, in which he placed it in a sitting position. Now, all being ready, after a parting glance at the house wherein was Silver Bells, Geoffrey launched the canoe. He shoved off, and a moment later was paddling rapidly across the lake in the moonlight. Whether he were observed or not he cared not, for he knew that by this time all the men would be too intoxicated to recognise him, even if he spoke to them.

One pair of eyes there was though which vaguely watched the canoe as it paddled away, and observed the general direction of the course which it took.

These were the eyes of Silver Bells, who, utterly unable to find repose, had been leaning out of the

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window. She had not, however, any idea that the canoe, which she saw thus speeding over the lake in the distance, contained the living form of her departing lover and the dead body of Father Antony. She merely thought that it was one of the intoxicated Indians, not knowing what he was about.

Long ere morning Geoffrey Digby had not only reached the second point of land which the Swampy Indian had told him about, but had passed it. He landed some way further along the coast and dug a deep hole in the earth, well above high-water mark. At dawn he interred the body of Father Antony, kneeling long over the grave and offering up many fervent prayers after filling it in. Then with an axe cutting the sign of the cross upon a tree at the head of the grave, Geoffrey said farewell for ever to the mortal remains of his friend. Entering his canoe, he paddled back to the second point, near which he soon found the creek of which Croaking Bull-Frog had spoken. At some little distance from its mouth he concealed his canoe in the bushes—then, shouldering all his worldly possessions, Geoffrey Digby stepped into the shallow bed of the creek and started off alone for an unknown country.

CHAPTER XXXI

COVERING HIS TRACKS

VERY difficult did Geoffrey find the travelling as he advanced up the bed of the creek. The branches of the trees on both sides either trailed down into the water and impeded his way, or fallen tree logs, attached to the banks by the roots, entirely barred all progress, especially when the branches as well as the logs were lying in the shallow water. At times, too, there were deep pools at corners of the stream, into which the water flowed with a sharp rattling current, gliding out again in a smooth run below, the whole lying between high banks. Places such as these were exceedingly difficult to negotiate, especially to a man carrying a pack upon his back in addition to a gun and a rifle, one too who was desirous of covering up his trail in so far as possible.

This Geoffrey was most anxious to do, for, having left the Crees at The Point on purpose to be alone, he did not wish to have his solitude intruded upon until such time, as, of his own accord, he should choose to return. Being naturally cautious as a hunter, he now exercised all his patience, accordingly, to proceed almost like an otter up the bed of the stream, wading and worming his way in and out among the branches without breaking them. He now thought, as he proceeded and had time to think, that his disappearance from the Indian camp with the body of Father Antony would be likely to cause a great deal of excitement among the Indians, when they had sobered down after their night's debauch. Knowing, moreover, the cupidity of Kichipinné, he thought it highly probable that, when he did not see

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Ready Rifle returning in a day or two, that swarthy Red-skin would excessively regret the disappearance of the man who was to have become his son-in-law. For Geoffrey knew well enough that Big Partridge looked forward to becoming considerably enriched by his skill as a trapper and with the rifle. It would be likely therefore that, a day or two after his absence from the lodges of the Crees should be discovered, a search-party would be organised to find his trail, follow him and beg him to return. Geoffrey did not expect to be followed sooner, as Indian hunters are in the habit of being uncertain in their times of returning.

The Crees in the camp therefore seeing, as they would do, that he had taken his rifle and a small camping outfit with him, would, Geoffrey argued, only think at first that he had, after burying the Father, determined to hunt a bit, so as to come back to camp with some fresh meat if possible. When he did not return they would get anxious, fearing that they had offended him, and that he meant to give up Silver Bells altogether, not marry her after all. That would, Geoffrey knew, be a bitter blow to the pride of Kichipinné and his brethren, who never could expect to make such a match for her again. A proud race were these Crees, as he knew well, ready to resent an injury to their pride, above all things ready to resent any injury to the honour of their women. Fortunately there had never been any question of that kind in the perfectly manly and straightforward conduct of Geoffrey towards the Indian maiden.

Nevertheless, he well remembered the circumstance that Soaring Swan had objected to his remaining upon the island with Silver Bells until he knew that Ready Rifle and his sister were betrothed.

These thoughts led Geoffrey, as he struggled along, back to Silver Bells herself. His heart ached for the poor girl. How would she feel when she found him missing, gone too without saying a word? Now that he was away from her, he could think of her with greater intensity and analyse his feelings also.

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What then were they now? He had no hesitation in answering himself—he loved Silver Bells as intensely, deeply and passionately, as he had ever done. As like a wild animal avoiding the hunter, he crept in and out of the stream, he felt that only to see the Indian girl's face would be to feel a gleam of sunshine on his heart—that to hear the musical tones of her low voice would be his greatest happiness. He longed for her in his solitude—the girl who, only think of it! was to have been his bride that very day. The maiden for whom he was to have given up all else, for whom his lodge had been prepared, and of whom his heart was full.

But—Geoffrey paused, and examined something which he had picked up off the ground mechanically and placed in his bosom the preceding night.

A circlet of feathers—crimson feathers and white ones alternately, in a band of ermine skin!

“The taint of the savage!”

He thrust them back again within his shirt with a sigh and continued his journey.

As the day grew older and the sun got high, Geoffrey began to feel the need of food. He had felt no inclination to eat at the feast of the preceding night, although he had made a pretence of so doing, and all that he had with him was a bag of flour, a small piece of salt pork and some salt.

The only use of the pork—almost all fat as the Indians love it—would be to cook with, if he had anything to cook.

But, although Croaking Bull-Frog had told him that the large dwarf poplar wood through which he was travelling abounded with feathered fowl, he saw neither pine partridge nor prairie chicken upon the, as yet, almost bare boughs overhanging the stream. Fish, however, he saw in plenty, *fontinalis*—the speckled brook trout of Canada—beginning to rise freely in the pools, sucking down the newly hatching flies as the sun grew warm. To catch them, however, was a puzzle, although, unsophisticated as they must be, these trout

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which had never been fished for would no doubt take the most clumsily tied fly that could be thrown to them.

Geoffrey felt in his pockets and found that, although he had brought a small fly book, he had unfortunately in the preoccupation of his thoughts on departing taken one containing no flies. It contained, however, a few bait hooks, mounted on gut. The only bait he had, salt pork, would be useless, and he had no line. A man does not, however, pass his life in the backwoods without developing his senses, until they become almost as sharp as the instincts of the wild animals themselves.

Why, thought Geoffrey, should he not be able to manufacture some sort of a line out of the tough fibrous roots of the tamrac or larch, used by the Indians for sewing together the sheets of birch bark when building their canoes. He soon came upon a tree whose roots had been uncovered by the water. Collecting some of the finest fibres of these roots, he tied them together and made a line. This he rolled up, put in his pocket and considered further. There is a fly much used in America known as the Parmacini Belle. The principal materials for this fly, crimson and white feathers, he had with him. It was simply necessary to tie them on to a hook.

This was easy—needle, thread and scissors no backwoodsman is without. Geoffrey had them in a housewife in his pocket. Taking out once more the crest of feathers which Silver Bells had thrown down when she had stabbed the lynx in the throat, he soon contrived to manufacture a couple of decent-looking flies. All he now wanted was a wand or pliable stick long enough to make a fly rod. For some time he sought this in vain. At length, however, he arrived at a spot where the stream ran through a little clearing. In this there grew some high willow bushes. They were at some distance from the banks of the stream but, even at the risk of leaving a trail in the young grass, it was necessary to procure a wand from them. He left the stream, walking on tiptoe and otherwise disguising his trail, cut a suitable stick, and returned by a circuitous route to the stream,

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re-entering it at a point below where he had left it. Both where he had left the stream and where he returned to it, he carefully moved the grasses back again with the point of his long stick so that no traces remained close to the bank.

Attaching his line and a fly to his improvised fishing-rod, he commenced, as he advanced, carefully casting up stream, whenever he saw a convenient place.

Geoffrey found at once that his tackle was all that could be desired. He rose a good trout at the very first cast, and after a struggle landed it, and presently he caught one or two more.

Not knowing how far he might have to journey without food, Geoffrey determined to catch all the fish he could while they were on the rise, which, in that early spring season would probably not be for long. Those he caught he carried with him by a larch sinew through the gills. As he fished thus, for a bare living, Geoffrey could not help smiling as he compared his present experiences with those which he had had when a boy, upon the banks of the Castleacre stream. It all came back to him—the water meadows—the water bailiff—the jealous parson. After that, the intervening years, until the time when he was with Fighting Sir Arthur and Lady McGeorge, fishing in Newfoundland, came to his mind. With the thoughts of Geraldine McGeorge, he remembered her letter and all the present problem of his life with which that letter had brought him face to face.

Lost thus in thought, he struck carelessly and far too hard, when an unusually large trout rose at his fly. In doing so, one of the knots of his larch-sinew line slipped, and the trout dashed away, taking the gaudy fly and most of his line with it. Although Geoffrey for a moment could see it, splashing about in some roots some distance below him, he thought it useless to attempt to recover the fish when the water on the surface ceased to move, and it was no more to be seen.

Taking his wand with him, he now continued his journey, looking for a place where he could land and cook

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his food. At length he came to a spot where the bank was slightly marshy. A bear had recently been there and had left deep tracks in the oozy soil. The tracks of a bear being very similar to that of a man clad in moccasins, Geoffrey determined to utilise this bear trail. He did so by stepping carefully in the bear's footprints and following them for a considerable distance into the forest. There, pulling off some strips of the inflammable birch bark, he made a fire, cooked and ate some of his fish, with some flour cakes, after which he felt much restored. Nevertheless, although in need of sleep, he returned to the stream, again following the bear's trail, but walking backwards in the tracks, an operation requiring considerable care.

In this manner, never relaxing his vigilance, did this practised backwoodsman pursue his journey, covering up his trail in one way or another every step of the route he followed. He found and crossed the high hill and the open prairie that the Swampy had mentioned, and, just before sundown, Geoffrey reached the first of the three little lakes, and found Croaking Bull-Frog's canoe hidden in the spruce bushes.

Here he thought himself quite safe from discovery, and therefore soon built himself a comfortable lean-to shelter just off the edge of the prairie in the cover of the spruces. He placed the open side of this lean-to so that he could look across the prairie. Then, with a prayer to God for himself, and a fervent one for the welfare of Silver Bells, he laid himself down to rest upon a scented and springy couch of Canada balsam.

Hardly had the hunter's head touched the ground ere he had forgotten all his perplexities and sorrows in that heaven-sent blessing, sleep.

CHAPTER XXXII

A MELANCHOLY MORNING

WHEN the dawn broke over the Indian camp at The Point it was as though it were over a city of the dead. Not as on other mornings was heard the regular sound of the axe chopping the fuel for the camp-fire, no smoke was seen ascending over the tops of the trees, no forms were moving about. Even the huskey dogs, wearied out by their night-long vigil, seemed to have forgotten to salute the first beams of the sun slanting on the lake with the usual matutinal howl of welcome. The only sound to occasionally reach the wakeful ears of Silver Bells, making the stillness if possible more oppressive, was the melancholy note of the lonely little bird, whose English name is "Farmer-sow-the-wheat," and which the French *habitants* have misnamed the *rossignol*. As, at intervals, it repeated its distressing and monotonous cry, the sad tones of the bird fell upon the heart of the Indian maiden as the foreboding of evil. It was the first time that she had heard its voice that spring, and the plaintive sound seemed to come as an ill-omen, to intensify the sadness of the poor girl's heart.

Although awake, Silver Bells, usually so courageous, was for once afraid to move. The recollection of all the terrible scenes of the previous night, the recollection of her own mistakes; of the good priest's death, which had followed so closely upon them; of Ready Rifle's grave, kind, yet almost severe manner towards herself; all together weighed her down and crushed her heart as with some terrible weight.

The awful and unusual silence of the camp seemed so

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unnatural as to be a presage of evil. The priest she knew to be lying dead close at hand. What if some awful calamity should also have happened to her beloved Ready Rifle!

When after leaving him she had obeyed his behest and gone among the howling, yelling crowd, to warn them of Father Antony's death, the bullets had been flying about the camp in all directions. Some of the Indians were crouching behind trees firing at one another—whether for mere devilment, or in earnest, she knew not. Silver Bells herself had been fired at intentionally by one drunken Cree, a new-comer to the camp. Notwithstanding this, she had found her father and Big Beaver and told them the sad news. The only result of her communication had been that Kichipinné had remarked sulkily that they had been priestridden too long, now they would go back to the habits of their forefathers. Kichiamik, with a drunken wag of his head, had said, "Ugh! no matter, Silver Bells, Kichipinné speaks the truth, to-morrow you shall marry Ready Rifle according to the fashion of the Crees." And then her father had driven her off to her couch like a dog.

Now this, the morning which was to have made her oh! so happy had arrived, but well did Silver Bells know that it was to bring her no wedding. Had not Ready Rifle himself told her that no marriage but a Christian one could be theirs. In an agony of sorrow the poor child lay still much longer, hoping to hear the sound of the morning axe.

At length the strain become too much for her, the terror of doing nothing was worse than the terror of learning the worst.

She rose and crept out of the log-house. No sooner had she done so than she wished that she had stopped within! The first sight which met her horrified gaze was the body of the Swampy Indian, Croaking Bull-Frog—dead, shot through the heart, his agonised features looking more hideous than ever in

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their war paint. Close by him was another dead man, in war-paint and feathers—a knife which Silver Bells knew to belong to Ready Rifle was sticking in his breast. Terrified, she recognised in those ghastly features the face of her uncle, Eagle Plumes! Other inert forms, dead or sleeping she knew not which, lay stretched here and there.

Kichipinné and Big Beaver were lying where she had seen them last by the now dead ashes of the great camp-fire, and in her terror the maiden feared to look too closely at them.

The sight of her lover's knife, however, stirred the trembling girl to action. "How could the knife have got there unless it had been taken from Ready Rifle himself! Holy Maria! perhaps he too had been slain." Terror lent wings to her feet. Silver Bells flew to the log-hut where she had left Geoffrey by the dead body of the priest. The door and the shutters of all the windows were closed. There was no glass, she might therefore have known they would have been so, unless Ready Rifle were stirring—he might be sleeping yet.

Silently, on tiptoe, Silver Bells walked round and round the house, listening at every cranny—not a sound. At length, in her increasing terror, she ventured to call, first at one window then at another.

"Ready Rifle! Ready Rifle!" There was no reply.

Driven at length to desperation, the poor distracted maiden tried the door. It opened, but all was dark and silent as the grave. "Ready Rifle!" she cried again. "For the love of the Holy Virgin, Ready Rifle, answer me—" Silence! Although fearing to see the dead body of the priest and perchance to find the dead body of her lover lying beside it, the daughter of the Crees now dashed in, seized the shutters of the Father's room and threw them open.

The room was empty—the corpse of Father Antony had disappeared. Now, as one distraught, Silver Bells rushed into the room which was to have been her bridal

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chamber. Ready Rifle was not there ! Horror ! had he been murdered and thrown into the lake ?

Overcome, the girl fell upon the floor, fell upon the very couch whereon Ready Rifle had been wont to lie. Not for long however did she remain unconscious, the agony of her mind was stronger than the temporary weakness which had benumbed her heart.

She rose, with a terrible shaking in every limb—rose and searched in both rooms. Ere long it was borne in upon her intelligence, by certain signs here and there, that Ready Rifle had not been murdered—no, he had gone away of his own free will and taken the body of the priest with him. The priest's blanket was gone, his crucifix was gone, but his garments and other things were there. Even was there left, by the side of his couch, the picture that he had shown to her yesterday of the woman of the pale-faces, she whom he had told her was his convert. Mechanically, Silver Bells seized upon this, examined it wildly as if it could give her some clue. With the picture in her hand she continued her search and her observations. The signs were easy enough now for her to read like a book. The priest had been wrapped up by Ready Rifle in his blanket and carried out. She could see where it had brushed the dust on one side outside the door—the feet had evidently dragged along. She followed the trail at a run to where the canoe of Ready Rifle should have been. It was gone !

Like a flash it now dawned upon the memory of the Indian maid that she had seen a canoe being paddled across the lake.

She understood it all now. That was Ready Rifle taking Father Antony away. She returned to the hut and looked round. Silver Bells knew all of Ready Rifle's things. She saw at once that both of his guns had gone, also his camp outfit. Then he had left her—he had gone for ever ! Was she not a savage—not fit for him ?

With both hands tight clasped upon her heart and eyes thrown up to heaven, the girl stood a while in her

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agony. Then she remembered the teaching of good Father Antony, she threw herself upon her knees, in the very place where she had kneeled when he had blessed her, and prayed—prayed with all her soul for light and guidance.

The light came to her. She would follow Ready Rifle and discover his trail ; she would go to him, ask for forgiveness, and promise never to be a savage again. She would vow, by the Mother of God, never more to allow the inherited instincts of the savage to rise up within her. And he would believe her—he would forgive her. Oh ! for sure, when Ready Rifle saw how truly penitent she was, he would forgive his little ignorant Silver Bells, praying to him so humbly.

No time was to be lost ; she would go out at once to a canoe. She would take some food—a little only, for he could not have gone far from her. Still it would, she thought, be wiser to take some, as it would not do to lack strength to come up with Ready Rifle, fail in strength to fly to him, beg for his merciful pity and forgiveness of the poor Indian maid who loved him so !

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE SEARCH OF SILVER BELLS

THE sleep of death and drunkenness still pervaded the camp when the grating sound, as Silver Bells launched a canoe, accompanied by the sharper rattle as an ash paddle struck lightly against a thwart, broke the silence.

As in proceeding to the canoe Silver Bells passed the mutilated carcase of the lynx, she averted her eyes with horror and loathing from its ghastly remains. Setting her teeth, she steadily looked before her with firm determination and high resolve. The weakness of the girl had now given way, rather was thoughtful courage depicted upon her features, which had never seemed so handsome, so noble as at that moment when she first plunged her paddle into the water.

There was a steadfast, far-seeing look in her eye as she glanced ahead in the north-westerly direction to which, as by instinct, the first silent strokes of the ash blade had urged her swiftly-gliding craft. A sad smile, one almost of irony, flitted a second across her brow as she reflected upon what she was about to attempt; realising that if she were to succeed in her endeavour it would be thanks alone to the inherited instincts of her Cree ancestry. She had the whole wide expanse of the lake before her, and at any point upon a shore margin of two hundred miles might Ready Rifle land. If necessary, the whole of that margin would she explore; if not to-day, subsequently. In the meantime, she would examine the nearest points first. Silver Bells knew that there was a trail through the forest, some-

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where within a few miles, leading from the north shore to the Hudson Bay Post; the first thing to be done, therefore, was to find this trail and examine it. If Ready Rifle intended really to leave her it was probable that he had followed that trail. On the other hand, her Indian cunning suggested a course which she would have followed herself. He might merely have started off in a north-westerly direction as a blind—and, when out of sight from The Point, have turned his canoe and gone due south, back towards the island. The heart of Silver Bells sank at this eventuality, but she only gripped her teeth the firmer—she would see!

There was only the faintest of breezes fanning the maiden's cheek as she sped onwards; this was a zephyr from the north-west. Like a hound, she sniffed at it at times, to see if it would bring her any indication, but it brought naught save the savour of the pines across the water. To any but an Indian it would have been no easy matter to have discovered the end of the trail upon the lake. For this, the sole means of communication with the north, was no highway, not even a beaten pathway, as the white man understands the word. It consisted simply of a narrow track between the bushes, and its termination upon the lake was blinded by a great clump of alders, just now becoming green.

From a distance, however, Silver Bells, to whom the coast presented merely an unbroken line of forest, took in the general bearing of the country and the hills beyond. Judging by a slight dip in these, which she thought it absolutely certain that the trail must cross over, she made a bee-line for the place where she thought it would come out. Her unerring instinct directed her to within almost a yard of the little narrow channel, scarcely wider than her canoe, which led to the landing-place. This was all trampled about and muddy, the Indians who had come recently to The Point having portaged their canoes to the spot and embarked there. Eagerly did the maid scan the footprints, then going along the trail almost at a run, examined them further.

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back. Wherever the ground was soft she learned the same tale, footprints were coming—none going. Notwithstanding this, even when the ground over which the trail passed became stony, Silver Bells followed and examined it. For might not Ready Rifle have made a detour through the forest and struck it higher up! There were many fallen trees, difficult to surmount, lying across the trail. These and the new grasses were all swiftly but carefully examined. The twigs of the boughs, broken by the travellers crossing these fallen trunks, and the flattened grasses, gave no indication of any traveller passing in the opposite direction, all being bent towards the lake. Moreover, nowhere in the softer ground had Silver Bells discovered any sign of broken earth, where a body could have been interred. Since, along the shores of the lake also in the neighbourhood of the landing-place, the Indian maiden had seen no break in the forest undergrowth affording space to bury a man, she was at length convinced that she was on a wrong trail. Ready Rifle had not passed that way. Sorrowfully she retraced her steps after her long, useless search.

Re-embarking, she pushed her canoe out once more a little from the land and journeyed westward. At length something attracted her attention. Looking ahead several times in succession, she saw large fish breaking the surface of the water. They were rising at some small object and refusing to swallow it, making great circles with their tails as they turned to go down. Paddling to the place where the trout were rising, the heart of Silver Bells gave a bound of delight as she picked up the substance to which the fish were directing their attentions. It was a small plug of half-burned tobacco—it was Ready Rifle's tobacco! He must have knocked out his pipe upon the gunwale of the canoe. Silver Bells wetted her fingers and, holding them up, felt the direction of the wind. The tobacco, she realised, had drifted a little way, but not far, being urged by the gentle breeze from yonder jutting point of land.

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Like a thing of life now does the birch-bark canoe bound over the lake, the swift strokes changing its hitherto gliding motion to a succession of eager leaps. Off the point the canoe's progress was arrested. There were no signs there of the canoe she was in search of being beached, no, nor in the mouth of a little creek which flowed into the lake on the other side of the point. Nor did there seem near at hand any convenient spot for the interment of the good Father Antony. Taking up her paddle once more, Silver Bells passed onwards, skirting the shore. At length, uttering a sudden cry, the maid turned the bow of her canoe shoreward and violently ran it up upon the strand, or rather, the water being bank high, on to the bank. Her quick eye had caught a small glimpse of white upon a dwarf poplar tree where the bark had been removed. As she approached, she saw that it was the extreme end of the left arm of a cross, facing the west, which she had been able to see from the lake. The earth at the foot of the tree had all been recently turned over. She had found Father Antony's grave! See! here were the marks in the soil of moccasined footprints, even the impression of the knees of him whom she sought—Ready Rifle. Crossing herself devoutly, Silver Bells fell upon her knees in turn, upon the same spot as Geoffrey had knelt before her. But where was he? The trail, so hot at this point, began and ended there!

Devoutly she strove only to think of the departed priest, for whose soul she fervently prayed. Yet her thoughts would revert to Ready Rifle, although, while her heavy heart felt like burning lead, the girl strove to rivet her mind upon her prayer.

Rising and taking up the birch-bark shovel, upon which the hands of her lover had, she knew, so recently been resting, Silver Bells implanted a kiss upon its handle. Then for a space the maiden devoted herself to making more tidy the last resting-place of this good man who—awful thought—had been talking to her but yesterday. Lastly, she picked some of the early wild

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flowers and, deftly tying them with grasses into the semblance of a wreath, deposited it upon the grave.

The most casual glance having revealed to her tutored eye the fact that the forest had not been penetrated beyond the grave, Silver Bells crossed herself again, entered her canoe once more and paddled away—in the wrong direction !

Wearying, wearying indeed was the search which the Indian maiden instituted along the shores of the lake to the westward of the grave. Everywhere, the same impenetrable unbroken forest met her eye. Vainly also did she strain her eyes for the sight of a canoe ahead of her—nothing was to be seen—alas ! nothing.

The indomitable will of the girl did not give way even when, after progressing for miles, she rested for a while convinced that she was no nearer to the man who had deserted her.

Now once more does the Indian maid examine the piece of half-burned tobacco and begin to draw logical conclusions from its appearance. Surely Ready Rifle would not have smoked before he buried Father Antony ! No, never so long as he was carrying his friend's body with him in his canoe. It must have been while he was pausing in his canoe to ponder, or while drifting with the wind, thinking what he should do next, that he smoked, hardly perhaps knowing that he was doing so. There was more than half a pipeful of tobacco left ; he evidently had not smoked for long. Perhaps only the time to go back from the grave to the point, to the leeward of which she had picked up the floating tobacco. There he must have landed after all, and he had, while carrying his canoe up out of the water on his head, contrived to rub one foot over the footprint of the other so as to cover up his trail. That creek, for miles along the coast, was, it was now apparent to Silver Bells, the only possible means by which Ready Rifle could penetrate into the depths of the forest without leaving an evident trail. Thus argued the maiden. Therefore, turning her canoe,

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she paddled swiftly back again towards the point where the stream flowed in ; where she landed.

Here the daughter of the Crees was not at fault long before she contrived to pick up Geoffrey's trail, thus to prove to her that her surmises had been right. It was very faint, merely consisting of the slightest indication here and there, and it led away from the creek. Following it, by picking out a disturbed leaf here, a bent and bruised grass blade there, she arrived at the hidden canoe. Beyond this no trail led. After thought, Silver Bells arrived at the truth—Ready Rifle had returned from that spot to the creek, along the same trail by which he had come, endeavouring to cover up both trails as he returned. Many an Indian even would have been baffled at this point, while not a white man living could have picked out that faintest of trails at all. Love, however, the despairing love of a deserted, wretched woman, aided the instinct born with Silver Bells in her blood ; thus she found the actual spot where Geoffrey had entered the bed of the creek. Certain now that he had ascended its course, she, after removing her moccasins, upon which hung her silver bells, entered it after him and, without pausing to look for any trail, plunged boldly upwards through the rough and tangled brushwood. Hope now rose high in her heart. Silver Bells felt sure that, without pausing and wasting time, she would come across indications here and there of him she longed so ardently to see. She hoped too that he might not be far ahead of her, that she might overtake him resting. The poor child was not very long in coming across indications, but they were not those that she expected. Suddenly, in a little swirling eddy under a tree trunk, two little floating objects met her gaze. Carefully she secured them, perceiving to her astonishment that each consisted of a few fibres or strands of a feather—a red one and a white one.

What did they mean ? There were no red or white birds here, and the only feathers of that sort she had seen had been those she wore the preceding night. Silver

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Bells examined the pieces carefully. They had been cut, and cut too, with a pair of scissors. Ready Rifle had cut them for some reason or other, but why she knew not. However, her poor, weary heart felt lighter—she was sure now that he was ahead of her. Sure also that since he had cared to take with him her own circlet of feathers, he must still love her. A moment later a dreadful thought came to shatter this bright dream of happiness. Ready Rifle had taken the feathers with him for an entirely different reason—to help him to hate her, to remind him that Silver Bells was a savage!

This thought was too much for the unhappy maiden, who had, moreover, been without food all day. She was utterly exhausted, both mentally and bodily, after the strain of so many hours' duration, for the afternoon was already far advanced. With difficulty she crept up the high bank out of the creek. Falling heavily upon the deep moss with which the wood abounded, she wept bitterly, her whole frame shaken with the violence of her passionate sobbing.

Careless now of wandering bears, or possibly migratory wolves that might not yet have gone north, there did she lie, as the shadows lengthened more and more. Even as the cold chills of night drew on, Silver Bells never moved from where she had fallen. What did she care for bear or wolf? Only let Makwah or Mahingan come and end her misery, she would welcome them; the sooner death should claim her the better; life contained nothing in it to make life worth living! Thus in a half stupor, half sleep, did the Indian maiden pass the night away in the depths of the forest.

CHAPTER XXXIV

ALONE

WITH the earliest streak of dawn Silver Bells awoke, to find herself chilled and cramped to such a degree that she could scarcely move. Pulling together all the fallen fir cones within reach, she soon made a cheerful blaze, before whose warmth her half-frozen limbs gradually recovered their circulation. The girl now remembered the food which she had been too miserable to think of the day before. She ate it all, careless of the future, and felt the better for it. The Indian maiden determined now to resume her lonely search for Ready Rifle, for Silver Bells felt far more inspirited, as the first rays of the sun came glinting through the forest trees, than she had been when last the lengthening shadows had begun to fall.

After a long and heartfelt prayer, in which thoughts of Ready Rifle were mixed with thoughts of the good Father, now gone for ever, Silver Bells stepped down into the creek once more and continued to splash up the stream. For some distance she journeyed onwards vainly looking for "sign"; the maiden even passed, without noticing anything unusual, the place where Geoffrey had returned to the water again after cutting the willow wand. Where he had left it, however, her quick eye detected something a little unusual in the grasses; she thought at first it was the trail of a mink. Stepping out of the water, Silver Bells followed this track, which her lover had certainly contrived to make as little human-looking as possible.

The young woman, so arduously searching, now

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noticed that it resembled more the trail of a beaver than that of a mink, for the fugitive had dragged his belt behind him on the grass to imitate the mark caused by the broad, flat tail of the beaver. Where he had cut the willow, moreover, he had done so in the manner that a beaver cuts a tree with his sharp teeth—that is upwards, on a slant from one side only. But one mistake the clever hunter had made. After cutting his wand, he had let fall a few small pieces of wood when making a notch in the slim pole to fasten his line to. These were enough for Silver Bells—nothing but a knife had made those shavings. She returned directly to the water without delay, yet more downhearted than before, as she recognised more than ever how determined indeed Ready Rifle must have been that neither she herself nor anyone else should trace him. Silver Bells now began to fear to find this man who so firmly held her heart. How, oh, how would he greet her?

She reassured herself on this head, however, when she remembered that never—even to a dog—had Ready Rifle been known to show anything but kindness. He could not therefore possibly be unkind to his Silver Bells, she who had shared with him the dangers of the attack of the wolves, and who at the risk of her life had run to rescue him across the broken-up ice. Not that there was anything in that—oh! no, it was nothing to what she would do for Ready Rifle—if she could. Presently Silver Bells found herself confronted by a danger which she would have courted the night before. Upon rounding a corner a little way up the creek ahead of her, she saw a black bear. It was seated on a small, round log over the stream and evidently fishing. For repeatedly did the animal with clumsy motions that were absolutely ludicrous, stretch out with one paw, striking at something in the water which it was unable to reach. Every time the beast struck out, the tree trunk it was seated upon shook so violently that the black bear nearly lost its balance and fell off. While uttering plaintive grunts of dissatisfaction, which seemed almost human in their

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expression of disappointment and fear, the big animal only redoubled its exertions. Silver Bells, afraid to move for fear of splashing the water and attracting the wild beast's attention to herself, remained spellbound. At another season she would not have been frightened of the bear, and would have shouted at it, trusting to its fear of the human voice to drive it off. But it was the spring of the year, the commencement of the season when the bears all over the region around Lake Nepigon become dangerous.

The Indian maiden had unfortunately now no opportunity of obtaining a firebrand to hurl at this bear, as she had done at the one which was poking its nose into the tent of Father Antony. There was, therefore, nothing to do but crouch silently against the bank, in the shadow. Bears, although keen of scent, are not at all sharp-sighted, and fortunately the wind was blowing from the bear to her directly, so that indeed she could plainly smell the animal. Another cause for congratulation was that she was standing on the edge of a deep pool. If the bear came after her she would swim across. For well did the maiden know that bears do not like taking to the water in the spring, the time when they are most dangerous. Presently, to her surprise, Silver Bells saw the bear entangle its claw in what looked like a long string. As it drew it towards him there was a great splashing in the water. There was evidently a fish attached to the string. Were there then Indians in the neighbourhood who set lines?

Getting keener than ever, the bear made a dash at the fish with its teeth. It fell into the water in so doing, but, seizing the struggling fish, instantly regained hold of the log. As it remained thus for a few seconds, holding on with its fore paws and with its back to Silver Bells, she could see the fish distinctly—a big trout. In its mouth she could plainly discover a large artificial fly made of red and white feathers. Now the maid clearly understood matters, for she had seen plenty of flies before.

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Ready Rifle had been fishing and had made a fly with part of the feathers of her head-dress ! And the fish had broken his line !

It was simple to understand ; how evident why he had cut the willow stick ! how clever he was to have made the tackle ! The girl hoped that he had caught some fish before he broke his line, which she felt sorry for, for no doubt he was hungry. Moreover, she hoped that the red and white feathers had proved useful to him for another reason, which was that he would not hate them so much—or rather despise her for wearing them. While these thoughts flashed through her brain, the bear scrambled back on to the pole and, the line breaking, got safely to shore with the big fish. There it shivered violently and shook itself like a dog, after which it went off at a clumsy gallop into the woods. The path being now clear, Silver Bells went on, securing as she passed the broken line of larch fibres which Ready Rifle had manufactured with his clever fingers. She took it with her, fastening her moccasins with it to her neck. They had previously been wrapped in her dress, thus the bells had not tinkled and alarmed the bear.

Not very far from this, after passing the bear's trail, which Geoffrey had followed, and not noticing anything particular about it, Silver Bells left the bed of the creek. She found now that Ready Rifle had caught some fish and was carrying them with him, for some tiny trout scales had rubbed off here and there against the bushes after he, also, had left the creek. She was glad of this ; he would not be hungry ; besides, the scales helped her to follow his trail which led to a hill. But why, she wondered, had he never stopped to eat ? Oh ! he must have been very hungry to go all that way without food ! The stones upon the hillside hurting the maiden's feet, she now put on her moccasins once more. The bells upon her ankles seemed company for her after this, as she, with very great labour now followed the trail, picking it out very slowly and making many mistakes. At last she lost it for a while on the rocky slope, where

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there was no vegetation. A stone or two, which had been recently displaced, served as a guide once more, just when she thought she had lost the trail completely. Silver Bells stood on the top of the hill at length—below her stretched a prairie, and beyond it a belt of trees. A great happiness filled the gentle heart of the maiden as she saw that prairie—those trees. Nothing, no attempt at concealment could prevent her from following Ready Rifle across that young grass, and he would surely have stopped under those spruces to rest. Yes, there, for sure, she would find him !

While the gentle breeze of morning fanned her feverish cheek, Silver Bells stopped for a time to re-braid the disordered tresses of her hair and arrange the disorder of her dress. She did not wish to arrive untidy and unkempt before Ready Rifle. Ah ! no, she did not wish to appear like a savage !

When Geoffrey awoke in the morning, if his body was refreshed his heart was heavy. After offering up his morning prayer and bathing himself in the lake, he returned to his lean-to and sat down in it to think.

His thoughts were of Silver Bells. Had he done well to leave the poor Indian maiden thus all alone among those savages ? Should he not return to her at once ? But his duty to his father and mother ! what was it ?

He took out the letter from Geraldine M'George and re-read the part of it which related to the affliction of his aged parents. Was not his duty to return to them, at all events for a time ? Yes, that was undoubtedly so, but he would return for Silver Bells and take her with him. Yet what would to return mean ? There was no deceiving himself, it would mean that he would have to take the maiden at once to wife—after the heathenish fashion of the Crees. And would the Crees ever allow him to leave them again once he had married the daughter of Kichipinné, by no matter what unholy rites ? No, never could he leave them unless he could contrive to escape. Yes, escape and take with him

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the dear maiden whom he loved and whom he knew loved him so deeply and devotedly. He would never go without her!

But, even if he did return, was he now sure of the welcome that he would meet with from Kichipinné and the rest? What might not their ill-humour prompt them to do, now they had no longer Father Antony's presence to restrain their passions? Might not their pride have been hurt? Would they not probably shoot him? Possibly they might, more likely not, that was uncertain, still how might they not treat Silver Bells in his absence, in their rage at the desertion of her betrothed? With him away, might not her life become one of misery—she herself be treated with contumely and scorn? Yes, in spite of Father Antony's last words, Geoffrey saw now which way his first duty lay—it was clearly towards Silver Bells, no matter what he might do later. He would certainly return to her, his mind was made up; moreover, he would marry her again upon the first opportunity, according to religious rites; that would give him perhaps an excuse for taking her away with him.

Having come to this decision, Geoffrey felt far happier in his mind. He turned to put his traps together to return, and had just picked up his Express rifle when a faint sound was borne to his ear across the breeze. He started and listened again—that sound—it seemed like a tinkling in the distance?

Silver Bells!

Springing to his feet, Geoffrey peered out over the prairie. Slowly he saw the maiden coming, looking at the grasses and picking out his trail as she came. And still came the tinkling of the little bells vibrating in the morning air. He remained spellbound—a great wave of love swept out from his heart towards this maiden, nought but whose love had so miraculously guided her footsteps to him over many a weary mile.

She came nearer and, raising her eyes, saw Geoffrey from afar.

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She gave a cry—a happy cry, and ran forward.

“Ready Rifle!”

“Silver Bells! Silver Bells!”

Geoffrey was about to fly across the plain to meet his betrothed with outstretched arms, when a dreadful sight met his gaze. In the far distance, coming over the crest of the hill against the sky-line, appeared the waving eagle plumes of two warriors of the Crees. He knew those stalwart forms—Kichipinné and Soaring Swan! The morning sun glistened on the barrels of their rifles! They evidently saw Silver Bells as they came on at a run—grimly.

In a moment the whole dreadful import of the situation burst in with an agony upon the young man's mind. If the Cree warriors should think that his betrothed and he, without previous marriage, had met in this lonely spot by secret appointment—if they should perchance imagine that the maiden had already, during the previous night, been the partner of his solitude, then they would kill her. Instant death would be her portion—and, since this was evidently what they did believe, although she knew it not, death was coming now—coming swiftly to Silver Bells across the prairie behind her.

He must save her!—he alone could save her! He must instantly convince those bloodthirsty savages that there was no collusion between himself and the maiden. More than that, that she never yet had joined him.

Deliberately, as though taking aim, Geoffrey raised his rifle to his shoulder.

“Silver Bells!—keep back—or I fire!”

He was pointing the gun at her. The Indian maiden paused amazed.

Silver Bells could not understand. This was surely some strange jest on the part of Ready Rifle, after his happy welcoming cry! She advanced a step.

“Keep back! One more step and I shoot you!”

Worse than a dagger these cruel words, ringing out

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through the morning air, pierced the maiden's gentle heart.

Was this then his welcome? Was it for this that she had risked the dangers of the forest to join the man she loved?

Her heart breaking at the awfulness of the surprise, the terror—aghast and horrified before those barrels that never missed their aim, Silver Bells stood tottering as though she would fall.

Humbly, appealingly now she threw up her arms towards Ready Rifle, but he never lowered the gleaming weapon—those deadly barrels which she so often had helped him to clean.

To die thus, when from that joyful cry she thought to have found love in his arms! Oh! no, she could not face death so. The daughter of the Crees shrunk from undeserved murder at the hands of Ready Rifle. She quailed before his weapon.

Slowly, sadly, despairingly at length Silver Bells turned to retrace her weary steps—alone!

With faltering steps, and hands stretched before her, as one blind, the broken-hearted maiden tottered back along her own trail.

Then she saw her father and her brother approaching in their war-paint and feathers.

She turned once more—swiftly now—her only thoughts were for the peril of the man who treated her so cruelly.

“Was Ready Rifle safe from their ire?”

His weapon—his deadly weapon—was still at the shoulder—the braves of the Crees were covered by its barrels—yes, he was safe! He could kill them both instantly, if they but so much as made a motion to raise their guns.

With head bowed once more, the maiden stumbled on and joined the advancing warriors. Kichipinné and Soaring Swan each took the maiden by an arm, and without a word to Ready Rifle, before whose determined

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attitude even their stout hearts quailed, they slowly led Silver Bells away.

Until at length the two crested Redskin braves and the slender maiden disappeared over the sky-line, these still came floating back, borne on the breeze, the gentle tinkle of the bells.

After that—silence ! unbroken silence !

Despairingly dropping his rifle, Geoffrey cried aloud in an agony to his Maker.

“My Father ! my Father ! what have I done to bear such a terrible cross ?”

CHAPTER XXXV

FAMILIAR FACES

A FEW days later Geoffrey Digby struggled into the Hudson Bay Post on the Albany River. The overseer at the Post, a Scotchman, McCluskie by name, was particularly glad to see the face of a white man at that juncture, especially when it happened to be that of a man so well-known to the Redskins as Ready Rifle. For there were a troublesome lot of Indians hanging round about the Post. They had been camping there for some time and were all more or less upon the drink, for in some manner there was a quantity of fire-water among the Indians that spring. Mr McCluskie suspected Joe Wilson and a couple of other half-breeds of having run up a lot of the stuff, but he had no proofs. Whether he had or no, he could do nothing, his principal concern being lest the Post be looted and burned. A hot-tempered man, he had already been exasperated almost beyond endurance, in some of the controversies he had had with the turbulent Redskins over the barter of furs; they, under the influence of drink, being unusually difficult to deal with. Fortunately, although immensely provoked by the insolence of the Indians, he had managed, so far, to keep his hands off them, for knowing that his life would probably pay the forfeit, he had with the greatest difficulty avoided striking the most overbearing among those from whom he had been buying furs. Geoffrey's arrival was therefore a perfect godsend to the unhappy McCluskie, who, expecting in more lots of Indians daily, was anxious to

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get rid of the tipsy crew who had come in first that season.

The Indians themselves were glad to see Ready Rifle, to whom they all thronged with voluble and voluminous accounts of their grievances against the overseer, whom they loudly accused of cheating them in the matter of the bargains made.

In the turmoil, among which he found himself suddenly plunged, Geoffrey found little time to think of his own grief. He saw the very real danger of the Hudson Bay overseer and determined to assist him to combat it by cunning.

Taking Joe Wilson as his lieutenant, this he contrived to do by getting a commission from McCluskie to take all the furs on hand down the river to James's Bay, and to engage all the Indians he could with their canoes for the purpose.

The Redskins were glad to take service under Ready Rifle, especially as the drink was now done, and the hunter did not give them time to change their minds. Two days after arrival at the Post, he started off down the dangerous rapids of the river at the head of a regular flotilla of canoes. After many exciting experiences in running the rapids, during which a couple of the Indians got drowned and some of the furs were lost, Geoffrey got through to the Bay. The canoe, however, which he and Wilson shared was wrecked, and that upon the very last day of the trip. After safely jumping a sheer fall of green water, the canoe struck upon a submerged rock in the tremendous rapid below. Down this both men were whirled at a fearful pace in the foaming water. They were nearly drowned before Geoffrey reached the shore, to see Wilson left perched upon a rock in the middle of the awful rapid and only a little way above a high cascade. The wonderful way in which he then, upon the flattened-out remains of his canoe, contrived to run down the rapid again and to save his comrade is still talked about in the annals of the Hudson Bay Company as one of the most daring

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feats ever accomplished among men by whom daring feats are common.

Be that as it may, Ready Rifle saved Joe Wilson's life, but lost his own rifle in the capsize. Strange although it may seem, of this fact Geoffrey was glad. For, although he had not dared to do without his rifle before he reached the Post, he felt a loathing for the Express after having pointed it at Silver Bells. When, therefore, it was at the bottom of the Albany River he was all the better pleased.

A fortnight after reaching James's Bay, Geoffrey Digby found himself in the hall of the old St Louis Hotel in Quebec, with absolutely nothing save the Indian kit he stood up in. Fortunate for him was it now that he had that deposit of two hundred pounds in the Bank of British North America. Thus he was able to purchase a few civilised garments and to engage a passage to Liverpool on board the SS. *Sardinian*, a comfortable ship of the Allan Line.

The last days of June had not yet drawn to a close when a slim young fellow, coming out of a house in Curzon Street, Mayfair, turned to gaze hard at the tall, stalwart gentleman who rubbed shoulders with him on the doorstep. It was, however, no wonder if young Sir Hugh Conway failed to recognise, attired in the frock coat and high hat of civilisation, the hero of the wreck of the *Bosnia* six years previously.

In the drawing-room within, however, there was a lady who required no announcement of the name to tell her that Geoffrey Digby stood before her.

Geraldine McGeorge stood for a moment looking at the new-comer, and during that moment her soul was in her eyes.

Then she welcomed this lost wanderer home again with kind words and gentle actions, and he felt it was restful, amid all the turmoil of his life, to have come where he had found a friend.

After running down to Norfolk to see his father and

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mother, Geoffrey stopped in town for a week or two of the London season. For his sister Grace and her husband happened to be living in town and she insisted upon his making his home with them at their house in Sussex Gardens. It was all very strange and unreal to the backwoodsman, this whirl of society, after the Red Indians, the floods and the forests of Canada. And yet when meeting beautiful young women daily, Geoffrey ever found himself making comparisons with Silver Bells, the daughter of the Crees. But he never mentioned the name of Silver Bells to a living soul, not even to Geraldine McGeorge, when occasionally of an afternoon enjoying a reposeful time in the comfortable house in Curzon Street and being cross-examined about his wanderings. For although he found it necessary to talk about the Red Indians at times, and his adventures with them, he contrived to do so in such a manner that none could tell the heavy weight there was upon his heart nor guess at the fact that an Indian maiden, named Silver Bells, was more to him than all the world besides.

When young Conway was present, Geoffrey found it was necessary to talk more about the Indians and their ways than it was at other times. For that lad, now a baronet, although by no means a rich one, was in the habit of declaring, much to the amusement of Lady McGeorge, his earnest intention of following that splendid fellow Digby's example and going to live among the Redskins. Geoffrey, who saw that the trouble was simply that the boy was hopelessly in love with a woman a great deal older than himself, rather encouraged the idea, thinking that it would do the young fellow good to have some more of the nonsense knocked out of him. For, in Geoffrey's opinion, young Conway, who had been left a very encumbered property by the uncle whom he had succeeded, had retired from the Navy far too soon and would be the better for some active occupation, involving a certain amount of danger and self-reliance. That he was courageous Geoffrey knew, for he had not forgotten how, when a rosy-cheeked midshipman, Hugh

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had caught hold of the bear and fired his navy revolver into its ear.

When Geoffrey returned to Norfolk he found that his father and mother, being both decrepit, would require a great deal of his presence at home. He therefore settled down at Thornham, assuming, at his father's urgent desire, more the position of actual head of the house than that of heir to the family estates.

While, therefore, to please his father, Geoffrey repeatedly filled the house with guests, had meets of the hounds on the lawn, and organised pheasant and partridge shoots, the old Squire, as proud as ever of his son, felt that he was living his own life again in him. His great anxiety now was to see Geoffrey married. Thus the Squire made by no means unfrequent allusions to the desirability of his selecting a woman with so many sterling attractions as Lady McGeorge. For in Geraldine both of the old people declared that they had a daughter already, especially when Geoffrey frankly admitted that it had been the information in a letter from their favourite that had brought him back to Thornham and his parents.

However, while falling in with his father's whims and fancies in all other respects, Geoffrey managed to elude this question of marriage. Even although his mother insisted upon having Geraldine McGeorge to stay with her half the time, while his sister Grace also urged him to propose to her, declaring with a sister's frankness that she was convinced that her friend loved him, Geoffrey was immovable. He always maintained the same attitude towards the woman, whom he had rescued off the coast of Newfoundland. It was, although an attitude of the frankest affection, one absolutely devoid of the semblance of love.

Had there been no Silver Bells in the background there is no knowing but that the charms of this refined woman, one so eminently suited to be his partner, would have had their effect upon his heart. Unfortunately, in spite of the civilised surroundings in which he now found him-

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self, there was never a night but Geoffrey would wish himself back in his teepee, lying upon the balsam boughs, while listening for the tinkling sound of bells upon the snow-clad ground.

Still, while filling the Hall with guests, among whom were Fighting Sir Arthur, Harry Montgomery and young Conway, the returned backwoodsman inwardly acknowledged that he could not of Silver Bells, the daughter of the Crees, well have made a hostess to entertain those guests!

The very idea almost made him smile although it was with a lonely despairing kind of smile. As the time wore on, his longing for the backwoods increased upon him more and more; but when, two years after Geoffrey's return, his mother died, he only felt it the more incumbent upon him to stay and watch over his father.

Now it was that, thinking constantly of the Indians and the backwoods which he could not visit, Geoffrey set to work to make a corner of Thornham look as much like the backwoods as possible. In this he was much assisted by Hugh Conway, who saw in him a hero as of old, and who, more frequently now than before, declared to Lady McGeorge his intention of becoming a Canadian hunter. Geoffrey, finding the ex-middy a most congenial companion and good pupil, constantly had him at Thornham and, with his assistance, by degrees thoroughly astonished the neighbourhood.

Selecting a spruce-grown island upon the great mere at Thornham for their playground, the future Squire and the young Baronet resorted thither daily. There, with their own hands, they built an encampment of Indian teepees; also, having imported birch bark for the purpose, Geoffrey instructed Hugh how to manufacture birch-bark canoes. The mere was stocked with *fontinalis* and rainbow trout, while, to make the scene more primitive, some live beavers were imported. Thus, before long, beaver lodges and beaver dams were among the interesting accessories of the Indian village of Thornham. Not only the old Squire and Lady

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McGeorge took the greatest interest in this remarkable imitation of a settlement of the Redskins, but it became before long the pride of the naturalists of the county of Norfolk, as Geoffrey added more and more Canadian creatures to his splendid collection. Yet, while all others who were admitted to view the spot declared that all was perfect, one there was who felt that it was imperfect, nothing but an empty void and a sham. For as, with young Conway in their home-made canoe, Geoffrey would stalk the wild ducks, or occasionally camp out in one of the teepees on the island, in front of which they would make a splendid camp-fire, there was always something missing, always someone desired with an aching heart.

Silver Bells—oh ! how he wondered how it fared with the Indian maiden, she for whose sake he had made all this ? Geoffrey determined in his heart at length that, if it were ever possible, he would go back to Canada and fetch Silver Bells—yes, bring her across the great black water in the big fire canoe. Then, instead of alarming her by taking her at once to live in Thornham Hall, she should become gradually accustomed to the country in a teepee on the island, amid surroundings perfectly familiar to herself. It was a wonderful idea, which Geoffrey kept, like most of his thoughts, to himself. This was perhaps as well, for, had he done otherwise, there is not the slightest doubt but that the good people of Norfolk would have declared that the young Squire of Thornham was downright crazy, an idea to which, from his wandering habits and Indian encampment, they were rather inclined already.

After Geoffrey had been at home for three years and a half the time arrived that he became absolutely his own master. For, during the Christmas festivities, when the house was full, his father, the old Squire, was seized with a fit of apoplexy, and died upon New Year's Day.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE LIGHT HAS GONE OUT

THE holly decorations and Christmas texts were still hanging from the walls of the beautiful old church at Thornham when the old Squire was laid to rest beside his wife in the Digby family vault.

“Days and moments quickly flying,
Blend the living with the dead.
Soon shall you and I be lying,
Each within his narrow bed.”

Thus, as his body was lowered into the tomb, sadly pealed forth the dirge from the lips of the white-robed choristers in the sacred precincts, which the dead Squire's generosity had done so much to embellish.

“A good man the old Squire—he will be sadly missed!” Rich and poor alike thronging to his funeral—the members of the Hunt from all the countryside, the farmers and the humblest of the villagers dwelling upon his estates, all had but one and the same encomium in honour of his memory.

Geoffrey, as he sorrowfully listened to the sad strains of the hymn and looked round at this people, who had now become his people, felt deeply the truth of the words of the former, and the weight of his responsibility to the latter. But as he pondered upon all the risks of his own life, in war, in dangerous encounters with wild animals, or in conflict with the elements of nature, he greatly marvelled that he had not gone to his long rest years before the old Squire. Moreover, as the last male

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representative of an ancient race which had come over with the Norman William, he felt that if the name of Digby was to be perpetuated at Thornham, now had come the time for him take a wife.

Who, then, was that wife to be? Was it the woman to whom his parents had been so devotedly attached?

He glanced across the open tomb at Geraldine, who was kneeling to lower a beautiful wreath into the chasm below. Clad in a long black sealskin, a black-bordered handkerchief in her hand, her refined features were beautiful in their tears. As she rose, her swimming eyes met his, inquiringly. They seemed to say, "Geoffrey Digby, what are you thinking about me? Has my devotion, born of gratitude and increased by almost daily communion, become sufficiently patent to you at last? Have my assiduous attentions to your mother and father in your absence, commenced for your sake, and continued for their own, moved you towards a woman, proud to all others, humble to yourself alone? If so, now is the time to seek with her consolation from your affliction. You shall find her worthy of your name and family." Something like this was undoubtedly in the thoughts of the sorrowing woman, magnetically conveyed in her simple glance to the brain of the sorrowing man. Geoffrey, as he met her gaze, felt their force; he recognised her worth, and knew that his father's words, repeated to him the day before his seizure, were true.

"Geoffrey, old fellow," the Squire had remarked, "there is no woman living whom I would rather see you marry than Geraldine McGeorge, who nursed your poor mother so devotedly. What is more, my boy, although I am an old fogey who has stayed a good deal too much at home, I'll venture to make you a bet. This is that, in all your wanderings, you never yet came across a woman more fitted, from every point of view, to become the daughter-in-law, wife and mother of the Squires of Thornham!"

These words, uttered so recently by his poor father, came into the young Squire's mind with renewed force

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when walking back to the Hall by the footpath through the park. Pacing sadly along under the great oaks by his weeping sister's side, while Geraldine followed with Sir Hugh Conway and the old Admiral, Geoffrey, raising his eyes, saw before him the noble proportions of the ancient mansion, with the blinds drawn down across its mullioned windows; the home of his ancestors looked very forlorn. But they could not remain for ever thus. The blinds would be raised presently, after which all that would be required was a mistress for the old place. Turning, he saw, following some fifty yards behind the group of which Geraldine was a member, another and much larger group of men and women clad in deep mourning. These were all the servitors at the Hall, streaming back from the funeral across the park. Who, thought Geoffrey, was in future to rule all that crowd, dependent upon the Squire of Thornham? who was to keep them in order? He had already taken the measure of many of them, and knew how they had imposed upon his easy-going father after his poor mother's death. Honest old servitors there were among them certainly, especially among the outdoor servants—the old coachman and head gamekeeper for instance whom he had known all his life. But the indoor servants, headed by a smart young housekeeper who, while humouring the old Squire, had robbed him, as Geoffrey well knew, right and left, what was he to do with all of them? Either he must discharge them all and close the old place or else—he paused—well certainly they wanted a mistress.

He looked at his sister Grace. She could hardly be that mistress for him. Her husband was a landed proprietor in Yorkshire. Her responsibilities, therefore, he could but recognise, lay in another direction. Thus as he entered the noble doorway into the great hall, where but a few days previously his father had sat superintending the building of the Yule fire, already the new owner of Thornham felt the cares of proprietorship sitting heavy upon his shoulders.

The post bag was lying upon the hall table as they

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entered, for it had not been unlocked that morning before the funeral.

Geoffrey unlocked the bag which contained a great number of letters, some being condolence, others were for guests who had been staying in the house but who had left when the old Squire had died. Giving out their letters to the Admiral and the others, the new Squire took his own and retired with them to his study.

Among them was a very badly addressed and dirty envelope which he threw on one side at first, merely thinking it a bill or a begging letter from some illiterate person. Having read the other letters, Geoffrey took up this epistle again, when he noticed that the Queen's head figured upon the stamp was upon one, not of Great Britain, but of the Dominion of Canada. Hurriedly now he tore the missive open, and eagerly perused the following misspelt lines :—

“Dear Reddy Rifle I am back at the village du sacre coeur and have got two or three letters of yours some is over a yere old also I got the bewtiful new gun which all the ojibboways is jealous of and my word it is a daisy there is a R.C. mission now at the other end of lake Helen they call it the nepigon mission I have given them all the new bibles yer sent out and the indian writing is very well dun the fathers are plesed I can tell you so should I be plesed to write you this letter in indian sines like the bible is written but I think you must most have forgot your indian by now. The railway has got right across here now the Canadian pacific we call it as it is going rite across the Rockies in time through to the coste I have been having work on it for the last two yeres off an on and good pay it has been too I have dun a lot of hunting further east for the pepal workin' on the railway and had the finest hunting I ever had I wish Reddy Rifle you had been with me I tell you I seen some moose worth talking of these last three yeres an never let the railway pepul go short on fresh meat we have the track laid now rite up to the south end of lake

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Helen just below it where the big whirlpool is me and you got cort in going up there is an iron bridge and there is going to be a little stashun called Nepigon. The sacre coeur indians is plesed and the half breeds as it means munny will come in. You ask me about the Crees there was grate talk all over the north among all the indians about you going away after the priest died and not marrying silver bells they said it was shameful of Reddy Rifle to desert the daughter of the Crees and you would be killed if you went back but that I don't think they dare do now the railway has come so close the maiden so I hear says she knows you will come back and that the only reson you left was because Kichipinné and the rest got so bestly drunk that they killed Croaking bull-frog and eagle plumes so that you was sick of them all but you never told me about that killing up on the Albany River. Some of the indians so I heard tried to say bad things about you and the Chief's daughter Silver bells but one or two of them as did so disappeered suddenly and I heerd that it is suspected that big partridge and soaring swan killed them for saying things against the maid the whole lot of Crees was away for two yeres and more but I hear they are back at The Point on lake nepigon now so likely they will be coming south to the island above the Virgin falls again in the spring. Now I have told you all the nuse Reddy Rifle I have a good canoe or two and if you write to me again I shall get letters quicker in the spring somewhere working along the railway and I will come back sharp and go anywere with you for you saved my life and I am very thankful that you sent me such a bewtiful gun. I forgot to say one thing the half breed Deschamps in this village he who married my girl as I told you all about once on a time told me some of the indians say you have married a white wife but he heard silver bells say these words Reddy Rifle has not married no white wife Reddy Rifle had reson for leeing but he does not want to kill silver bells. I thort you would like to know this so in case you are married not to come back here as it

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wouldn't be safe I think not but that there is always one who would fight alongside Reddy Rifle and that is his friend,

JOE WILSON.

Geoffrey Digby sat pondering over this letter for a long time. He did not go in to luncheon which, just the same as on days when there was no funeral, was set in the dining-room, but had at length a glass of sherry and a biscuit brought in to him where he was. At last, just as dusk was coming on, taking his hat he walked out. He was going through the comfortably-warmed conservatory leading out to the grounds when, passing round a tub containing a tree fern, he came in actual collision with a lady. His expression must have shown his annoyance, for Geraldine McGeorge, whom it was, had a pained look upon her face as she said in quiet tones,—

“Does the sight of my face annoy you this afternoon, Geoffrey? Pray do not think I want to intrude upon your grief; if you wish to be alone I will withdraw at once. I was merely pausing here, wondering what to do, I felt so unhappy indoors that I did not feel as if I could stay there, and now that I have got as far as this I do not want to go out. Grace has a headache and is lying down, so I hardly cared to go out alone.”

“Forgive me, Geraldine,” answered Geoffrey. “I was merely surprised, and did not mean to be rude. Will you not come and take a little turn with me? the air will do us both good; it is sad in the house, as you say, now the poor old governor has gone. But glad I am though that I have been able to be at home the last year or two of my parents’ lives. I have got you to thank for that, Geraldine. If it had not been for your letter I should never in all probability have come home at all.”

They had gained the garden by this time and were, without knowing it, walking rapidly in the direction of the mere. This was all frozen over and, had it not been for

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the Squire's death, its surface would have been covered with happy skaters.

Geraldine looked at her companion long and wistfully before she spoke.

"I am indeed thankful, Geoffrey, that my letter was the cause of your returning to your father and mother, but I must not take too much credit to myself for writing as I did, since in speaking for them I was speaking for myself also—" She faced him abruptly, "Will you tell me, Geoffrey, why, if I had not written, you would probably never have returned at all to England? It must surely have been some very serious reason—which could have made you take such a decision as that—when you had all this to come to." Geraldine waved her hand so as to include the whole landscape of the Hall, the wooded park, the great mere and the coverts beyond it. She continued, after a pause, with more animation,—

"I imagined that after our dear friend Father Antony's death, on the very night that you were able to show him my letter, you had nothing to detain you longer. What then was your reason? I hope you will be frank and tell it me."

"It was indeed a serious reason, Geraldine, which would have made all this quite impossible to me—at any rate during my father's lifetime. All that remained possible to me was that!" They had reached the margin of the frozen mere by this time. Geoffrey pointed across to the island at the nearest teepee which he had built with Hugh Conway.

"That! that wigwam? I scarcely understand you, Geoffrey."

"Yes, that or another, or possibly a log-house occasionally when the winter was very cold indeed."

"I know what Canadian cold is like; you must remember that I was in Nova Scotia for over five years; but I have certainly never lived in a wigwam in winter. It must indeed have some wonderful attractions about it, when you could prefer it to Thornham Hall. Will you

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kindly give me your hand? We will walk across the ice and have a look at the teepees. I should like to view them from the point of view of a winter residence."

The ice was now crackling under their feet. In a few minutes they reached the island. Stooping, Geraldine entered the teepee—it was dark. Geoffrey entered after her and struck a wax vesta. Lady McGeorge tried and shut the flap which served for a door then, as Geoffrey struck a second match, said meaningly,—

"You know that I am your mother confessor, Geoffrey Digby, and I have, while realising the extreme discomfort it must be for anyone to live in a place like this in the winter time, been thinking out your meaning. You must have surely had some violent attraction out there. Was it for the sake of some Indian girl, with whom you had an affair, that you actually wished to pass the rest of your life in a wigwam like this? Even then," Geraldine laughed nervously, "it would have been most cold and uncomfortable for you in a Canadian winter judging by what it is here now."

Geoffrey struck another match and begun unfastening the door flap—something urged him to tell the truth. He turned to his companion, whose bright eyes looked both so wistfully and so inquiringly at him.

"Geraldine—it was for the sake of an Indian maiden. I intended to marry her,"—he paused—"her name was Silver Bells."

"Silver Bells? Was she beautiful?"

"Yes, she was beautiful, courageous and good!"

"Oh! well, at anyrate, all that folly is over now; you have of course never heard any more of this girl since you left Canada?"

"Never until to-day—when I heard that she believes that I will go back to her."

"And will you go back to this—this savage—called Silver Bells?"

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“Yes, I think that I shall go back.”

Geraldine McGeorge gave a shiver and clutched rather than grasped at her companion's hand.

“Geoffrey—please to take me home—the light has gone out! I am cold!”

CHAPTER XXXVII

A WEARY HEART

Who can ever tell the acute tortures which wrung the heart of the astounded and unhappy Silver Bells when she realised that, not content with fleeing from her, her adored lover was ready to fire upon her if she advanced a step towards him ! Her pride was, however, sufficiently strong to sustain her crushed and bleeding heart for so long as she remained in sight of the false Ready Rifle. During all of this time she never uttered a word to her father and brother, although she was vaguely conscious of the fact that Kichipinné and Soaring Swan were muttering threats of some kind against the man who but two days previously had been their bosom friend. When, at length, the crest of the steep hill had been surmounted with infinite difficulty, and she knew that the eyes of Ready Rifle would be unable to witness her weakness, the Indian maiden succumbed. Every faculty of which she was possessed seemed to give way at once and, her legs refusing longer to support her, Silver Bells fell in a miserable heap upon the further slope. Her father and brother contrived to carry her down the hill so far as the bank of the creek, but there their own strength gave out. For although when they had set out rage caused by the idea that Ready Rifle and Silver Bells had fled together had sustained them, after they had followed her lonely trail until they saw that the girl had absolutely no collusion with her lover, the effects of the fumes of the poisonous alcohol once more resumed their sway.

Both of the Redskins were overtaken with deadly

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sickness, and were glad enough, at the bottom of the hill, to lie down by the side of Silver Bells and endeavour to obtain relief from their misery in slumber. It was late in the afternoon before the braves of the Crees felt sufficiently restored to resume their journey. By this time, although able to walk, Silver Bells had by no means recovered from the lethargic oppression which had overtaken her brain. The poor child's mind seemed to be quite stupefied when the Indians arrived with her at night at the mouth of the creek, where her canoe had been left and their own also. There had been no difficulty in following her trail from the first. Her canoe could be seen from the lake lying upon the strand, and, while following Ready Rifle, Silver Bells had taken no means whatever to cover up her own trail. When eventually the poor maiden had been taken back to The Point and handed over to the care of her mother, she appeared as though she had lost her reason. So indeed she had done, for Silver Bells, deprived of any hope in life, was attacked by a terrible disease which the Indians did not know, but which was in reality a species of brain fever.

From this affliction the unhappy maiden recovered at length, but when she did so her condition was only the more miserable. For, with the full use of her senses, she had none of the resources of civilisation wherewith to combat mental suffering. Except for the Bible she had no literature. There was no particular place to go to, no one to pay visits to. Had she been only, as she was before Geoffrey had come into her life, able to enjoy the outdoor pursuits and practices to which she had been brought up, her existence would not have been such a miserable one. She had now, however, no zest for these. Ready Rifle had come into the life of this poor daughter of the Crees with the force of a god, imposing his presence upon her heart and brain almost to the exclusion of her own identity. To such an extent did the love which Silver Bells bore for Ready Rifle predominate over every other sensation, that when

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he was cruel to her, and she was left alone, she remained absolutely without mental support from any kindred spirit to sustain the anguish of her disappointment.

At length her sole resource became reading so much of the Indian Bible as Father Antony had completed and left her, and fortunately the greater part of the Scriptures had remained as a solace to Silver Bells in her distress. By degrees, as her brain became stronger, Silver Bells began to understand, or think that she understood, the action on the part of her lover which had grieved her most, which was his levelling his rifle at her. She now grasped the fact that, after his first happy cry to her, Ready Rifle had seen Kichipinné and Soaring Swan coming over the prairie behind her, and that he knew sufficient of their natures to realise that, if they thought that dishonour had come to her in any way, a rifle bullet would instantly despatch her to another world. And, under the influence of the accursed fire-water, as both of the men were, that anything less than the ocular demonstration of his Express levelled at her would fail to convince them had rightly occurred to Ready Rifle. She now felt convinced that even if he had fired, he would not have injured her. Further, she understood that he would not cry out to her and say that the Crees were coming up behind her; for, had any conversation been called out between them it would have been overheard, and even if not distinctly overheard, would have been considered evidence of collusion, with the result of her death at the hands of father or brother. The poor maid felt somewhat happier in her mind when, by arriving at these rightful conclusions, she was able to some extent to exonerate Ready Rifle from the intentional cruelty of which he had seemed guilty towards her at first. As to his motives, however, in leaving her, she had no doubt. Ready Rifle now looked down upon and despised her because she had developed openly the instincts of the savage, those inherited instincts against which Father Antony had so often warned her. Moreover, the

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drunken orgies of her relations had, she felt, been so awful as no self-respecting white man could expose himself to witnessing a second time.

"Oh ! why was I born a Cree ?" would poor Silver Bells cry aloud as, in despair, she thought upon her misfortunes and the improbability of her ever in this world seeing Ready Rifle again. Then the Indian maiden would pore long hours over the photograph of Geraldine McGeorge, and think that, if only in appearance and clothes she could have resembled the woman of the pale-faces beloved by Father Antony, then she could have been sure of, not only winning the love of Ready Rifle, but keeping it, and also his respect in the face of everything. Strange irony of Fate ! What would not the original of that portrait have given to have been able to obtain the love which was so richly showered upon the deserted and forlorn Indian maiden !

Silver Bells, however, never connected the portrait with Geoffrey in any way ; she only looked upon the pale-face woman as a convert of Father Antony's. Therefore her poor heart was spared many an extra pang, which it would have suffered had she had any inkling of the real state of affairs.

As the months and years rolled by, despite her own great despondency, Silver Bells would never admit to the rest of the Indians that Ready Rifle would never be seen again in the lodges of the Crees. On the contrary, she would insist over and over again upon the fact that, so soon as he should have sufficiently recovered from the disgust created by the horrors of the night of the wedding feast, he would return to fetch her. Kichipinné, however, as he saw his daughter gradually getting weaker in health, grew more and more morose, and, although he did not utter his half-formulated ideas in the presence of Silver Bells, as the days passed by and still there came no Ready Rifle, thoughts of murder grew in his heart, being communicated to and shared by Soaring Swan. An additional reason for the Chief's

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anger was the fact that the story of Silver Bells having become widely known, no other suitor appeared to seek the honour of her hand.

Only Big Beaver, however, would never hear a word said against Ready Rifle by either the Chief or his son. Moreover, that burly Redskin would often attempt to cheer the lovelorn maiden by recounting to her tales of the prowess of the absent one, and by readily agreeing with her, when Silver Bells expressed her conviction that he would not let her die of grief at his absence, that he would surely one day ere long return to shelter her in his strong arms. And thus then with Silver Bells the months and years rolled wearily by with an unvarying monotony. Each year spring brought with the melting of the snows a renewal of hope to the heart of the gentle maiden; each fall that hope sank away once more into the pit of despair, where soon it was frozen as solid as the waters in that land of the north.

During the summer of the year of the departure of Ready Rifle, Kichipinné, with his band considerably recruited by several families of Crees who had come in from various directions, moved many miles westward to the great plains of Manitoba to hunt the buffalo. Finding the rapidly-decreasing herds becoming scarcer and scarcer on the prairies the Indians followed them or their kindred, the wood buffalo, up to the north of Athabasca, even, one fall, roaming as far as the Barren Lands, where they turned their attention to the slaughter of caribou and musk oxen. Two or three years were passed thus, and although much game was found at times, at others the greatest state of privation existed in the camp of the Crees. Moreover, having come into contact with an overpowering band of their ancient enemies the Blackfeet, Kichipinné and his braves were forced to retire, but not until after a fierce conflict, which lasted for two days, and in which many of the Blackfeet braves were slain. In the course of this fighting, which was practically for the monopoly of the last of the buffalo on the plains, the Cree Chief had several of his

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own men killed and also received a bullet in his left side. Among the slain was his sole surviving brother, Crested Crane. The Chief being disabled and his brother dead, Big Beaver, assuming the leadership, drew off the remainder of the Crees, much to the disgust of the fierce and sulky Soaring Swan.

He, burning to retrieve the fortunes of the Crees, had himself sought to assume the chieftainship and to continue the hopeless struggle when, greatly to his anger, the men of the tribe flatly refused to acknowledge the supremacy of the son of Kichipinné. They chose rather to follow Big Beaver, whose advice to retire, they said, was good, especially as the quantity of buffalo remaining was not worth the losing of any more lives. After this there was always more or less bad blood between Soaring Swan and Big Beaver; nevertheless, when eventually the Crees had returned once more to the country to the north of Lake Nepigon, the ill-feeling seemed to die out. Thus, when Kichipinné recovered from his wound and Soaring Swan took a wife, they all settled down together amicably as of old. By degrees, moreover, as the news of the advancing railroad reached the remnant of the tribe which had escaped the Blackfeet bullets, the band became less and less. For most of the braves, hearing that both dollars and fire-water were now easy to obtain, moved off in the direction where these were to be found, and actually condescended to abandon for a time the use of the rifle for that of the pick and shovel.

Despite these desertions of his followers, Kichipinné, who had never acknowledged the supremacy of any man, refused to be tempted thus late in the day even by the prospect of the fire-water. The bloodthirsty old Chief preferred, he said, to die as he had lived, independent and rifle in hand, to working like a squaw at the bidding of any pale-face trash. Since the ideas of his son, Soaring Swan, and of Big Beaver coincided with those of the old warrior, these three braves alone of the Crees continued to follow their old mode of existence. It is

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not to be supposed, however, that while thus gratifying his inclinations, Kichipinné became more good-tempered as he grew older, or more disposed to forgive Ready Rifle for his desertion of himself and his daughter. On the contrary, he was inclined to take this desertion to heart, as a personal affront to himself more even than to Silver Bells, after the fighting with the Blackfeet. For, the old Redskin argued fiercely, had Ready Rifle but been his son-in-law and with him in those encounters, there would doubtless have been a very different tale to be told. The fighting having on both sides been more or less from behind cover, Ready Rifle, with his wonderful skill in shooting, would have picked off man after man of the enemy, when they exposed for a moment but head, arm or knee!

Neither he nor any of his braves could shoot like that, although, fortunately for themselves, they could direct their weapons with, if anything, greater precision than could the braves of the Blackfeet. Arguing thus, the old Chief nursed his grudge, but finding that Big Beaver turned an unsympathetic ear to his complainings, he had perforce to content himself by gloomily pouring them into the ear of the ill-conditioned Soaring Swan.

The constant animosity which, even if not wholly revealed, existed in her father's mind against Ready Rifle did not escape Silver Bells. On the contrary it made her already tired heart become heavier—her wearied spirits all the more sadly despondent.

Gradually the Indian maiden began to feel existence within her growing weaker, and, although the victim of no apparent disease, the daughter of the Crees daily found her feet becoming heavier. The strength of her body failing, the girl's life was gradually ebbing away, her heart was broken, she was slowly sinking. Nevertheless, she still bravely maintained her old defence of Ready Rifle. "He will return," she would say, "to the daughter of the Crees! Ready Rifle will not leave Silver Bells to die without once more beholding his face."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

WESTWARD BOUND

It is by no means an easy matter, as a rule, for the inheritor of a great estate to straighten out the affairs of his predecessor and to set everything going once more smoothly, in working order, under the new *régime*.

So, at all events, Geoffrey Digby realised with impatience when, several months after his father's death, he still found himself concerned with his affairs. This too, although the depression in land values not having yet commenced in Great Britain, all the farms on the Thornham estate were let, and to good tenants. It is not until a man dies that the real secrets of his life are known, and thus, to his astonishment, Geoffrey found that, practically since his college days, the old Squire had raised money on mortgage upon the property. Moreover, he had been paying out money in annuities in several directions of which he had never given any intimation to his only son.

These matters all required to be seen to and regulated. By the time, therefore, that the heir had been able to pay off legacies, raise sufficient money to satisfy all outstanding claims and engage the services of a trustworthy land agent, the month of May had arrived.

Long before this, Geoffrey had definitely made up his mind as to the course he intended to pursue. This had been settled for him by the letter which he had received from Joe Wilson, in which mention was made of a

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Roman Catholic Mission having been established upon the shores of Lake Helen, on the lower reaches of the Nepigon River. He determined to seek out Silver Bells, take her to this mission and be married by the Fathers there. Now that the country was being opened up by the advent of the railway, he had no longer any fear of being retained against his will by Kichipinné, or forced by him to a union with his daughter by any other than Christian rites. Having now for upwards of four years, experienced the joys of civilisation without the Indian maid, his heart had only told him all the more forcibly that, with or without that civilisation, Silver Bells was absolutely necessary to his existence. Apart from his own personal feelings, which he looked upon as being merely selfish, Geoffrey felt more and more strongly as the days passed by that he was bound in honour to the Cree maiden to redeem the promises he had made to her. Had there been anything wanting to confirm him in his resolve, it was supplied by the touching confidence shown in himself by this daughter of the Crees, as exemplified by her words, reported by Deschamps, the Ojibboway half-breed, to Joe Wilson.

Now that both his father and mother were dead, and his responsibilities to them had therefore ceased, Geoffrey realised that the mere fact of the beloved maiden, born among the Redskins, having inherited some of their instincts, had ceased to have its original importance. He had fulfilled his duties conscientiously to his parents, although, had not Kichipinné and Soaring Swan so unfortunately followed up the trail of his betrothed, his conscience compelled him to admit that he would previously have overlooked the question of her inherited instincts and returned to make her his bride. Instead of which, what had he done? Levelled his rifle at her heart and vowed that he would shoot her dead. What an awful thing! In his bed, in his comfortable room at Thornham Hall, Geoffrey would feel his hair rise upon his head with horror when, in the

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silent watches of the night, the recollection of that tragic occurrence recurred to his mind. Its recollection, however, only served to emphasise his impatience to fly to Silver Bells, with gentle words to remedy the wrong which he had unintentionally committed to sear the trusting heart of the beautiful Indian. What must she have felt, as the years rolling on had convinced her absolutely of her definite desertion by the man she loved ! For even should she, by her innate intelligence, have subsequently divined the necessary cause of his cruel action at the moment, what sign had she ever received from him subsequently to show that he would ever return ? And yet she had trusted in him—she should not be deceived !

As Geoffrey was uncertain as to the time of his probable absence from home, or if indeed he would ever return to Thornham with his Indian bride, the question of the selection of a land agent was an important one. This matter, as well as the caretaking of Thornham Hall, was satisfactorily settled in a convenient manner through the old Admiral.

Fighting Sir Arthur was a widower, and having now retired, on a pension, from the service, found himself with but a modified income and no home. Among his relations whom, with him, Geoffrey had invited to the shooting-parties at Thornham was a nephew of the Admiral's, married, with a young wife. This was a Captain Leonard Scott, an officer who had been severely wounded, after showing great gallantry in the recent Ashanti Expedition under Sir Garnet Wolseley. He was a man of evident ability, one who would undoubtedly have risen to distinction in the Army had not the severity of his wound compelled him to resign his commission.

Having taken a great fancy to the Scotts, who were not very well off, Geoffrey made a proposition to Sir Arthur which proved particularly agreeable to his old friend. This was that his nephew should be installed as land agent at Thornham and that the Admiral should

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make his home with the Scotts in one wing of the Hall.

This having been satisfactorily arranged, Geoffrey wrote to Hugh Conway that he was ready to sail, and passages were booked for Quebec.

The final farewells between the young Squire of Thornham and Geraldine McGeorge were written, not said, for that lady had never trusted herself to see Geoffrey again after the day following the funeral of the old Squire. Then he had driven her eight miles, which passed very silently, in his mail phaeton to the station at Swaffham, to catch the London express. There, raising her blue eyes to his, with an expression of mute appeal within their depths, she bade him farewell, silently extending both her hands to Geoffrey, with a lingering grasp which was far more eloquent than words.

Let us draw a veil upon the unexpressed feelings of the unhappy Geraldine as, upon the train steaming out of the station she threw herself back, in tears, against the cushions of the railway carriage.

Nor, although nothing in his face displayed his emotions, was Geoffrey unmoved at this parting.

"There goes one who has always shown herself my truest friend," he muttered. "I wonder if I shall ever see her again, and if she will still feel as kindly towards me when we next meet?" Then, with a sigh, he left the station and took his spirited horses for a long round before returning to the Hall, only just in time to dress for dinner.

It was upon the 14th of May that Geoffrey Digby, accompanied by young Sir Hugh Conway, sailed from Liverpool upon the SS. *Mongolian*, and upon the 23rd of the same month the pair stepped ashore beneath the Citadel of Quebec, that queen of the St Lawrence, made for ever famous by the deathless heroism of Wolfe and Montcalm.

As, mounting in one of those curious two-wheeled

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vehicles peculiar to Quebec, called a *calache*, the pair of friends drove up the steep hill to their hostelry, both were in excellent spirits. Hugh who was absolutely devoted to his older friend, was delighted as, almost at every turn, he saw French or English Canadians stopping in the street and nudging each other, with pleased surprise point out to one another his companion as the far-famed Ready Rifle.

During the voyage the ex-middy had proved himself the most excellent of companions. He still was but a boy in all his feelings, and, boylike, Hugh had naïvely laid bare his heart to his friend, whose kindness in taking him with him to Canada he highly appreciated.

"Geoffrey," he said to him one night when the two were smoking their pipes together on deck, "I want to tell you something. I may be a young ass, but I cannot help it and I must say it now. It is this, that, ever since we had that adventure together with the bear in Newfoundland, there have only been two people I have really cared about in this world—Lady McGeorge and yourself.

"Of course I was but a boy then, but, even in those days, I could see, what you apparently did not care to, that Lady McGeorge thought an awful lot of you. As for me, I worshipped the very ground she trod upon. But the odd thing was that, although I hated, with a boyish hatred, the flag lieutenant, conceited idiot that he was, or anyone else who so much as offered a hand to Lady McGeorge when she stepped over the gangway, I never had any of these absurd feelings about you. For I realised in a measure that you had a right to her, that she belonged to you, for you had saved her life; besides which, I felt a kind of boyish consolation when I remembered that she had honoured me by wearing my clothes—I keep those togs still."

"Come, Hugh, that will do," said Geoffrey, "you are talking sheer nonsense, old fellow, and I don't want to hear any more."

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He rose to pace the deck, but the lad restrained him.

"No—Digby—listen to me now, there's a good chap, and when I've once said my say I sha'n't bore you again, so do sit down."

Whereupon, Geoffrey once more seating himself, the lad continues,—

"Well, you see, then came the adventure with the bear, and you were so awfully plucky and Lady McGeorge said she'd be a mother to me and kissed me just as though I were a kid. Well, I admired you both more than ever after that, and thought about you a lot afterwards with a kind of an idea that I wished that she could marry you and that you both would adopt me as a sort of younger brother or something of that sort."

"As for my part," here interposed Geoffrey, "I am perfectly ready to do, Hugh, my lad, and as, so far as I can see, Lady McGeorge has also done for long past."

"Yes, that's just it—but to go on. Then, you see, Geoffrey, old General McGeorge died, and when you came home I saw that, while I was still far too young for her to look at in any other sense than that she had always done, she was evidently as devoted or perhaps I may say more devoted to you than ever. But, Geoffrey"—here the lad laid his hand on his friend's arm—"but, Geoffrey—I have always thought what I feel sure Lady M'George has thought also, that you have not had quite the same feelings towards her as she to you."

"Hugh," said Geoffrey, quietly, "don't you think you are going just a little too far in talking in that way about Lady McGeorge's feelings to me? You know you have no right at all to suppose anything about her—much less to say things like that—which are painful."

"I mean no disrespect to her, Geoffrey—and, if you will only hear me out, I think you will see that I do not wish to take any unwarrantable liberty with her name—but I am coming to my point—it is this—if I am mistaken,

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and you should really care about her, then I should be still only too happy that she should become your wife and that—and that you would both continue to be kind to me. But if—I only say but if—there is anything else—any other woman in your life or any other reason why you should not think an alliance between yourself and Lady McGeorge possible—well, then—well, then, old fellow, don't you think there might be some possible kind of a chance for me after all? You know, I am only seven years younger than she, after all—and now that I am a man, that difference is by no means the same as the enormous difference that it seemed when she had an old husband living and I was only a boy !”

“Hugh, my dear boy !” exclaimed Geoffrey, warmly wringing his friend's hand, “you have given me your confidence, and I will respect it and give you mine in return. Of Lady McGeorge's feelings I have no knowledge, and, indeed, have no right to have any—but of my own, I can speak. For me there is only one woman in the world, and she is not Geraldine. She is a little Indian girl, named Silver Bells, and I have come out to Canada to marry her, and brought you to be my witness and best man in the business, if you will, like a good fellow, oblige me by being so. There, now, you have it all in a nutshell ; that is my secret. But one thing I will add, it is this—I have noticed things too, and as I have well understood your feelings I thoroughly appreciate their nobility—especially judging by what you have just said about myself. In return I can honestly tell you this—If there is any possible manner in which I can help to promote your happiness I will do it, with all my heart.”

After this expansion on the part of the honest young fellow had provoked from Geoffrey his straightforward avowal in turn, the two young men were very much more to each other—they indeed became as a pair of devoted brothers.

No sooner had they installed themselves in the St Louis, then the only hotel, than it became evident that

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the return of Geoffrey Digby, formerly so well-known as Ready Rifle the hunter, had already created an unusual excitement in the old French city.

The enterprising editor of the *Quebec Times*, with his colleagues of the *Mercury* and the *Telegraph*, were soon at the hotel to renew an acquaintance of many years' standing with an old friend and to seek an introduction to the young Baronet. But although, with a view to interesting articles in their respective journals, many were the questions that they asked, the replies given to each alike were the same and but simple ones.

Mr Digby had brought out his friend, Sir Hugh, to teach him something about wild sport of all kinds in the land of snows, and they intended to commence their Canadian experiences by a fishing trip to the Nepigon River.

To this they found that it would now be possible to journey by train, although the latter part of the journey would probably have to be undertaken on either a freight waggon, or a locomotive used for the purpose of dragging along the trucks of ballast for the constantly extending track of the Canadian Pacific Railway. What a difference, however, was this to the time of the last visit of Ready Rifle to that famous stream! Then birch-bark canoes or roundabout routes by steam boat along the great lakes had been the sole means of approach. Now a day or two by train would, after passing for many miles along the northern coast of Lake Superior, land them upon the very shores of Lake Helen. It was decided to start west in a day or two. In the meantime Geoffrey explained to Hugh that it would be as well for them to see about laying in their stock of supplies in the city of Quebec. In addition to this, before going away for what might be a long period, he wished, he said, to write some letters home, consult a lawyer about some legal affairs, and make some arrangements about money at the Bank of British North America.

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All of these matters having been satisfactorily attended to, farewell was said to friends. Then, accompanied by the good wishes of all the hospitable inhabitants of Quebec, the pair of Englishmen set out for the west.

CHAPTER XXXIX

TOGETHER

UPON the journey in the comfortable train to Montreal, Geoffrey, for the first time, told his young companion the wonderful details of his career in so far as it had relation to Silver Bells. As he related to Hugh adventure after adventure, painted, moreover, in convincing but not exaggerated colours, the various acts of cool courage of which the Indian maid had been the heroine, the young Baronet's astonishment was only equalled by his admiration.

When the climax was at length reached, by the story of Geoffrey's flight with the body of Father Antony, followed by his successful tracking by Silver Bells and the tragic *dénouement*, Hugh was almost moved to tears with sympathy both for his friend and the unhappy daughter of the Crees.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, "she must indeed be a glorious, a noble girl, that Silver Bells. And how the poor thing must have suffered. You are indeed right, Geoffrey, to go back and marry her. I shall esteem it an honour to know such a noble woman. By Jove! that was a magnificent thing she did when the wolves got into the camp. Don't I just wish that I had been there to help her—and you."

"By catching hold of the ears of the wolves, I suppose, Hugh," replied Geoffrey, smiling, "or by firing your pistol down their throats? Well, I assure you that we could have done very well upon that occasion with the assistance of a smart fellow like yourself, but now I want to talk of something else. You

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know, as I have been your banker as well as my own for the trip, that I have followed out my usual arrangements and left a sum of money on deposit at the Bank of British North America at Quebec. Now, after I have married Silver Bells, it is just possible, whatever my intentions are at present, that I may not be able to get away with her from her father Kichipinné and the Crees, her relations, quite so soon as it may be convenient for you to come back. I have therefore made arrangements so that, in such an eventuality, you will be able to get out what money you want, and also I shall want you particularly to go to the bank to see about some business for myself. I left with the bank manager some papers, which I can trust to you to see about in case I don't get back to Quebec in time to go for that trip moose-hunting with you up in the Lake St John country. So will you kindly see about them for me?"

"With pleasure, I will do anything you want, and I feel it an honour for you to trust me to do what I know you could do far better for yourself. However, I hope to goodness that there is no hitch about your returning, for I sha'n't care a bit about the moose-hunting alone."

"Well, that's settled all right," said Geoffrey. "It's just as well to have things cut and dried, although I, too, hope that we shall be able to come east again together. I wonder, by-the-bye," he added, smiling, "what Silver Bells will think of a train! Wolves, bears or breaking ice, she is accustomed to, but a train—well, I have heard of some Indians almost going crazy with fear and excitement the first time that they found themselves behind a locomotive."

"I don't believe that your Silver Bells will be one of that sort," rejoined Hugh, speaking with conviction. "If she is anything like the estimate that I have formed of her character, I expect that that Indian girl will just sit quietly in a corner, look trustingly up at you, with those great swimming eyes that you talk about, and be perfectly happy, feeling that she is safe anywhere with

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her Ready Rifle, now that at last he has come back for her."

"Thank you, Hugh, I believe that you are right and that is exactly what she will do; but halloa! here we are at Montreal. We'll go up and pass the night at the Windsor, for this will be, I expect, the last one that we sleep under anything but a tent for a long time to come."

When, a morning or two after the above recorded conversation, the pair of friends tumbled off the cab of a locomotive at the spot where an iron bridge crossed the whirlpool of the Nepigon River, Joe Wilson, backed up by a crowd of Indians and half-breeds, was waiting to receive them.

Then it was that the young Baronet was able to realise thoroughly in what esteem his friend was held by all those wholly or partly of the Redskin race.

As, all together, those denizens of the backwoods rushed forward to welcome Ready Rifle back again among them, Hugh Conway felt that it was indeed an honour to be in the company of such a mighty hunter. The worst of it was, that soon finding himself included, as that hunter's friend, in the cordiality of the forest welcome, he was perfectly bewildered by the voluble sentences addressed to him in the Indian tongue. It was not until Joe Wilson was made to comprehend by Geoffrey that the Soto language was unknown to his friend that any of the half-breeds even attempted to speak to Hugh in English or French, with both of which languages he found that they were perfectly acquainted. Presently a dozen willing pairs of hands seized upon all the articles of their outfit and marched off with them across the long bridge and down the steep hill towards the dark and swiftly-flowing river, which he saw shining between thickly-wooded banks below.

In accordance with Geoffrey's instructions, Hugh Conway had, upon leaving Montreal, arrayed himself, like his mentor, in backwoodsman's kit of loose shirt, large felt hat, and moccasins, in which latter un-

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accustomed footwear he felt extremely uncomfortable. He now received a surprise, by perceiving that not only was his friend dressed like an Indian, but that he was actually every bit as much of a *voyageur* as any one of the swarthy tribe there present. There were, he had noticed, two new birch-bark canoes lying by the side of the railway track where they had alighted, the weight of each of which would be about a hundred pounds.

Suddenly saying "Come on, Hugh!" to his astonishment the young Squire of Thornham, who already had a heavy package in one hand, with the other picked up one of these canoes almost as if it had been a feather.

Reversing it, he placed it upside down upon his head, as though it were some gigantic hat of which the peak extended far in front and behind. Simultaneously with this action Geoffrey started off with his load across the bridge, and directly afterwards was to be seen descending, with the canoe skilfully balanced, the high embankment of the railway line, which had a slope as steep as the roof of a house. Hardly had Conway recovered from his astonishment ere he perceived the canoe rapidly disappearing through the bushes up by the riverside. Before he had realised that, to avoid having to paddle the heavily-laden craft up a rapid, his comrade was making his first portage for about a mile along a trail leading to Lake Helen, Joe Wilson seized the second canoe in a similar manner. The half-breed also went off at a pace which it took the young man all he could do to keep up with, even although he had no load. What a difference indeed, thought Hugh, between the smart young country gentleman, whom he had seen during the preceding winter attired in the correctest of pink, with tops, breeches and high hat, in the hunting field and the backwoodsman so agilely "loping" away under his canoe! Truly! his friend was no carpet knight, no tender-foot, but a real child of the forest like the rest. A quarter of an hour later the canoes were skilfully packed, most of the baggage being placed in one, which

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was manned by two of the Ojibboway half-breeds, the La Rondes.

The young Baronet was instructed to seat himself in the other, when, with Geoffrey, paddle in hand, at the bow and Joe Wilson at the stern, they were soon flying merrily along over the waters of the lake, which was about eight miles in length.

When some six miles of the eight had been swiftly traversed, the rapid river was entered once more, and before another hour had elapsed the Indian village du Sacré Cœur was reached. All the time Geoffrey had paddled as though he had never done anything else in his life, his skill and strength were marvellous to behold; neither seemed to have deserted him in the least during the four years which had elapsed since his return to civilisation.

That afternoon, in spite of Geoffrey's anxiety to proceed, the travellers were forced to accept the hospitality of Joe Wilson and the other inhabitants of the Indian villiage; but next morning early they were off again, and a tremendous day's journey it was. After the rapids below the magnificent Alexandra Falls had been successfully negotiated, there was a long portage, over a mountain and through a forest, of two and a half miles duration. During this Geoffrey never tired. He was at the other end of the portage trail, and had his canoe in the water again ready for another start, before his friend, now also carrying his "butin," had contrived to rejoin him. Then came Lake Jessie, after which a portage, through wonderful scenery at "The Narrows," was necessary to avoid a fearful rapid. Then following the rapid was another lake called Lake Maria. After this, many miles of heavy paddling up the river led to the fearful rapids at the Split Rock portage. Only at the head of these rapids would Geoffrey pause to take an hour's rest. A short way above again, an island lying between two tremendous waterfalls was reached. Here, early in the afternoon, tents were pitched and a camp was established, more than twenty miles against the swift

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current having been accomplished since the morning. Now it was that for the first time the ex-middy was introduced to the splendid speckled trout of the Nepigon, for he enjoyed the finest evening's fishing that he had ever even dreamed of in his life. By the next evening, after an even harder day's work than the preceding one, the canoes during the day having been worked up one heavy rapid after another or portaged around many impossible cataracts, camp was pitched at the foot of the tremendous Virgin Falls. What is considered a good three days' journey by the Indians had been accomplished in two and a half days' paddling and portaging, and yet Geoffrey Digby was as fresh as ever, after frantic exertion for forty miles of the tremendous flood.

The state of suppressed excitement, however, under which his comrade was labouring, was plainly perceivable to Hugh Conway, as they sat by the camp-fire that night.

Geoffrey now told his friend that he had received certain intelligence that the Crees, with whom he had so long made his home, were once more encamped upon the little island on Lake Nepigon, at a distance of scarcely more than four miles as the crow flies from the spot where they then were sitting. Of Silver Bells he had been able to obtain no definite information; indeed, none of the Indians whom he had met had been to the island. Those of them who were Crees had informed Ready Rifle that they had avoided it intentionally, for fear of the old Chief Kichipinné, who bore them no good-will since they had left him to work for the pale-faces. They did not know at all how it fared with the daughter of the Crees.

No wonder, thought Hugh, that Geoffrey should evince a certain amount of anxiety; indeed, he shared that anxiety with his friend. Moreover, when he learned that Geoffrey intended to visit the island alone on the following morning, Hugh endeavoured to dissuade him. So also did Joe Wilson, who said that,

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from what he had heard, Kichipinné was dangerous, while Soaring Swan and Big Beaver might be so also. The half-breed, therefore, urged his friend Ready Rifle to permit both himself and his white friend to accompany him to the home of the Crees. It was, he considered, an essential precaution that all should take their rifles with them. The two half-breeds, the La Rondes, were, he said, useless for anything but paddling; they would not, for their lives, venture to visit the home of Big Partridge.

Geoffrey, however, ever thoughtful of others, declared that if there were to be any danger he would face it alone. He it was who had abruptly left the Crees, probably by so doing incurring their animosity. He again it was who was going to seek as wife the maiden whom he loved, she whom he had been compelled by circumstances to leave. Why should he ask or allow any others to share the risk, if there were any? Not, however, that he really believed that there would be danger of any kind. For, argued he, when Kichipinné knew that he had come back for his betrothed, the Chief of the Crees would be only too glad to welcome him—as he came—in peace.

Therefore Geoffrey said definitely in conclusion, he should go to the island alone, and would, moreover, go unarmed.

The only concession which he would make, in deference to the wishes of his comrades, was that he should allow Joe Wilson to portage the canoe with him round the Virgin Falls to the point on the lake opposite the island. There Wilson could watch, and if he came back with Silver Bells or, wanted any of her simple belongings portaged around the Virgin Falls, whence he would re-embark with his intended bride on the way down to the mission, Joe could help him.

As for Hugh, he, so Geoffrey insisted, should stay and fish on the morrow, in the splendid rapids at the foot of the falls. Those rapids were the home of Namaycush, the great lake trout, up to fifteen or twenty pounds in

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weight, and, should they all be going down the river again, happily in the afternoon he would not get another chance of making the monster's acquaintance. Joe Wilson and young Sir Hugh Conway were compelled to agree to these arrangements. Secretly, however, they made a slight alteration in them. This was that no sooner should Joe have started with Ready Rifle and his canoe in the morning than Hugh, with the La Rondes, should follow them with the other canoe over the portage trail to the lake, keeping out of sight in the bushes, until Geoffrey should have started across alone to the island.

In the morning early, after a light breakfast, Geoffrey, who seemed in the highest spirits, shook hands with his friend and departed with Joe. No sooner had he started than Hugh followed him across the trail leading round the falls. As he came up to the lake above them, he saw that Geoffrey was already nearly across the island. A second later the barking of huskey dogs announced his arrival at the landing-place. Now they could see him run his canoe up on the strand, jump nimbly out and walk under the trees, among which the conical tops of several teepees could be discerned.

When Geoffrey, disembarking from his canoe, walked up to the familiar encampment, he did not at first notice anything but the cross, which had been placed by himself above the remains of the two unfortunate women who had been killed by the wolves. A moment later, however, he saw Kichipinné and Soaring Swan both seated on the ground smoking. They had evidently seen him coming, but they gave him no sign of greeting, nor did they return his friendly salute; they merely continued smoking. Ominously, Geoffrey now noticed that their rifles were lying on the ground by their sides.

Undeterred by the incivility of his reception, Geoffrey spoke again boldly: "Wherefore does not Kichipinné welcome Ready Rifle back to the lodges of the Crees?"

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The son of the pale-faces has come to claim his bride, Silver Bells !”

“Ugh !” said Kichipinné, removing his pipe and spitting disdainfully, “does Ready Rifle then like dead women to marry, since first he kills them and then he seeks them to wife ?”

Geoffrey felt his flesh creep with horror at these words. Nevertheless he mustered up courage to inquire, “Where is Silver Bells, Kichipinné ? Surely the Chief is mocking me, the maiden is not dead !”

“Silver Bells is dead and Ready Rifle has killed her,” remarked Soaring Swan, rising slowly and, with a savage look, lifting his rifle. “And now,” he continued, “Soaring Swan is going to kill Ready Rifle.” His bloodshot eyes glared more like those of a demon than a man as he deliberately uttered these words. At this moment Geoffrey heard the faint tinkling sound of bells within the teepee against which the Indians had been sitting.

“You lie !” he exclaimed, springing forward. “Silver Bells is not dead. Silver Bells !” he cried, and rushed towards the wigwam.

As Geoffrey dashed forward both Kichipinné and Soaring Swan flung themselves upon him. There was nothing lethargic about their movements now ! Like tigers, they held Geoffrey and tore at him to hold him back. But his strength was greater than that of the two Indians combined. Striking like a madman at his assailants, he gained ground and won nearer to the teepee.

At that moment Big Beaver appeared at the door of the teepee, holding up in his arms, so that she could stand, the fragile form of Silver Bells. Her eyes glistened with the joy of fulfilled hope. “Ready Rifle, beloved !” she cried, “the heart of Silver Bells was not deceived, she knew that you would return. Silver Bells will die happy. We shall meet again !”

The maid fell back apparently dying in the protecting arms of Kichiamik. Soaring Swan now released his hold upon Ready Rifle to pick up his fallen weapon.

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Geoffrey, struggling with Kichipinné, threw heavily to the ground the Chief of the Crees. Then, seizing from the arms of Big Beaver the form of Silver Bells, he enfolded her in his arms, passionately kissing those beloved lips once again. With an inarticulate murmur of love, the dying girl raised her face to his.

At this moment Soaring Swan discharged his rifle into the back of Geoffrey. The bullet passed through both him and Silver Bells. He did not, however, fall at once, but struggled bravely with his dying love to the cross over the grave.

“We will die here together, Silver Bells!” Another shot was fired. Geoffrey and Silver Bells fell to the ground together—dead! Almost at the same instant a shot from the rifle of Kichiamik blew out the brains of Soaring Swan. Big Beaver instantly sprung upon and possessed himself of the dead Cree’s rifle, also seized and flung away that of the Chief, and then he covered the latter! Thus he held Kichipinné, powerless, cowering under his pointed weapon. A few minutes later Hugh Conway and Joe Wilson, landing on the island, found them thus.

Geoffrey and Silver Bells, locked in each other’s arms, were at the foot of the cross, the heart’s blood of each commingling in a crimson stream!

CHAPTER XL

L'ENVOI

JOE WILSON, Sir Hugh Conway and Big Beaver sadly buried Geoffrey Digby and Silver Bells near the cross, just as they had fallen tightly clasped in each other's arms. Before laying them in their last home Hugh reverently removed a tress of the brown mixed with a tress of the jetty locks ; these he bore away with him as a sacred souvenir of that splendid fellow Ready Rifle, that noble, faithful maiden, the daughter of the Crees.

A week later, wan, haggard and miserable, Hugh Conway crept back to the historic city of Quebec. Sadly sounded to his ears the music of the waves of the mighty St Lawrence, sweeping for ever by the Heights of Abraham, sacred with the imperishable fame of Wolfe and Montcalm.

From the Dufferin Terrace, whence but a short time before he had, with his true-hearted friend, surveyed the noble scene below, sadly for a while the young Baronet gazed upon the grey walls of the Citadel, the fluttering Union Jack. Long did he remain there, upon the exact spot where Geoffrey had stood with him gaily discussing the details of their forthcoming expedition. Then, with a weary sigh, he turned and, in obedience to his dead comrade's behest, sought the bank in the oldest part of the city, near the brink of the rushing waters.

At the Bank of British North America he received from the manager a large envelope. This, when opened, proved to contain a letter, and the last will and testa-

L'Envoi

ment of Geoffrey Digby. The letter ran as follows :—

“ Hugh, old fellow, I feel that it is more than probable that I may be going to my death. By my will, enclosed, I have left Thornham Hall to you, and all my property of every description equally divided between Geraldine McGeorge and yourself. There is one condition attached, in complying with which I hope you will oblige an old friend, that is that you should affix my name of Digby to your own. Will you oblige me in this ? It has ever been an honoured name, and I hope that it can besaid that the last of the race has left no stain upon the ancient escutcheon of the house. I have written to Geraldine a letter, in which I have warmly begged of her to repay the honest affection which you have for her by becoming your wife. Even should Geraldine McGeorge not see fit to accede to a dead man's request and marry you, the property is still to be divided as I say. I think, however, the terms in which I have addressed her will move her to make you happy, if it only be for the sake of one—he can say it when dead—whom she loved while living. I have respected her above all women and, had it been God's will, should have loved her myself even as you do. As things were not so fated, that you may find mutual joy and contentment in each other is, dear Hugh, my final and most ardent desire.”

When, a few years after the above letter was opened, Geraldine, wife of Sir Hugh Conway-Digby, bore him a son, the parents gave to the boy the name of Geoffrey.

THE END

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To find a parallel for the rapidity with which Mr. Hubert Wales's books have made him famous, it is necessary to go back to the early days of Mr. Rudyard Kipling. First "Mr. and Mrs. Villiers," then "The Yoke," and "Cynthia in the Wilderness," and finally "The Old Allegiance," in turn, struck a note of sincerity and virility that proved to the public that a writer of temperament, of originality, of ideas, and of exceptional mental endowment was coming into his kingdom. The controversy which has not ceased to rage round Mr. Wales's ideas shows that his work has the breath of life in it. In his new novel, which is called "Hilary Thornton," the originality of the theme is not less apparent than the splendid courage and consistency with which the author carries it to an inevitable termination. It has never been a reproach to Mr. Wales that his novels lack the element of human passion, of human strength, and human weakness. In "Hilary Thornton," superadded to a story of piercing emotion are conceptions of public life and private duty which, though they touch upon matters of opinion, do not tend to lessen the power and interest and vitality of the story, which is better expressed, better thought out, and more mature than Mr. Wales's previous books; and which can be conscientiously and, indeed, warmly recommended.

THE GREATER POWER

By HAROLD BINDLOSS, Author of "By Right of Purchase"

A story of Colonial life, in which a young Englishman, who rashly undertakes to reclaim a flooded valley on the Canadian Pacific Slope, and the daughter of a forest rancher who finds him half dead in the snow, largely figure. It relates his struggles with frost and flood, and certain financiers who intrigue against him, and also deals with the conflicting influence of two women upon the man's character. The scenes are for the most part laid in a great cañon of the Pacific Slope.

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John Long's New & Forthcoming Books

SIX SHILLING NOVELS—*Continued*

A FORSAKEN GARDEN

By JESSIE AINSWORTH DAVIS, Author of "When Half-Gods Go"

"A Forsaken Garden" tells the story of a girl who, from respect for her father's prejudices, allows her chances of happiness to slip away from her. The defeat of love leads after some tribulations to a haven in which the consciousness of duty nobly fulfilled brings with it its own consolation. There are moments of dramatic fire in Mrs. Ainsworth Davis's novel, which is imbued with a refined spirit, is charged with strong feeling, and whose atmosphere of religious thought has nothing narrow or dogmatic in it.

THE FAULT

By C. T. PODMORE, Author of "A Trombone and a Star," "A Cynic's Conscience"

Intense human interest is the keynote of this story, in which the passions of the two men, Waterlow and Cridland, are so deftly woven round the centre figure of Hester Lane that the reader is given no pause until the final page is reached. The impression then left is a startlingly vivid one, and it is felt that a fuller knowledge has been gained of the trials and temptations that may assail lives apparently passed in rural tranquillity. It is a remarkable and highly dramatic story by which Mr. Podmore will assuredly make his mark.

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John Long's New & Forthcoming Books

SIX SHILLING NOVELS—*Continued*

THE MEMBER FOR EASTERBY

By JAMES BLYTH, Author of "Amazement,"
"Rubina"

It will be remembered that in "Amazement" Mr. Blyth published a strong indictment of the Divorce Laws, and in his new book he presents a different view of the same legal procedure, dealing especially with the facilities which it affords for blackmail. Mr. Blyth has woven into the legal and social interests of the book a love tale of some complexity and realism. Certain chapters of the book contain bitter but amusing satire on provincial society, and throughout the development of the story Mr. Blyth's writing is well qualified to enhance his reputation as one of the first realists of the day.

LINKS IN THE CHAIN

By HEADON HILL, Author of "The Hidden Victim"

Mr. Headon Hill belongs to the school of fiction in which there is no beating about the bush ; his effects are obtained by the direct method. He has a story to tell, and he tells it without recourse to superfluous padding. From the beginning of "Links in the Chain" the reader finds himself plunged into an atmosphere of black mystery, and his sensations are kept on the *qui vive* through a quick succession of incidents at once perplexing and disturbing.

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SIX SHILLING NOVELS—*Continued*

THE QUENCHLESS FLAME

By VIOLET TWEEDALE, Author of "Mrs. Barrington's Atonement"

Violet Tweedale's latest novel is daring and dramatic, but it is absorbing and entirely removed from the ordinary novel of the present day. It opens in the wilds of Chili, and the first chapters are concerned with the meeting of the two leading characters—an Englishman and a Chilian peasant, who later on becomes a celebrated adventuress. The events quickly following the opening are lurid and terrible, but replete with human interest.

A SOUL'S AWAKENING

By W. TEIGNMOUTH SHORE

Mr. W. Teignmouth Shore has endeavoured to paint a truthful picture of a section of London life that has of late years been much neglected by writers of fiction. His theme is the old one—two men and one woman; the married woman who loves her old husband, but loves another man better—truly better, because her love purifies and uplifts her instead of dragging her down. But it would not be fair to readers of the story to give anything more than a hint of the plot.

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John Long's New & Forthcoming Books

SIX SHILLING NOVELS—*Continued*

HARRY OF ATHOL

By R. H. FORSTER, Author of "A Jacobite Admiral"

Of the living writers of historical fiction, Mr. R. H. Forster occupies a position of "splendid isolation." To find his equal in knowledge and in capacity for portraying the past in all its pageantry, we must go back to the period of Walter Scott. Mr. Forster has done for Northumbria what Mr. Hardy did for Wessex, and Mr. Blackmore for Devonshire. In "Harry of Athol" his battle-ground is the rebellion of the Earls of Northumberland against Henry IV.—a subject rich in historic interest and in the romantic spirit. It is needless to say that the author rises to the occasion and does complete justice to one of the most picturesque periods in English history.

THE PENALTY

By JAMES BLYTH, Author of "Amazement,"
"Rubina"

In this novel Mr. James Blyth gives us, as usual, the life-story of a girl, but for the nonce he has left the sights and sounds of the marshes and transplanted his heroine from Daneshire to London. The snares and pitfalls of life in London for the unprotected girl form the sub-theme of the story. Helen is a memorable creation in the gallery of this author's portraits of women; and the story itself glows with the deep human feeling which characterizes all Mr. Blyth's work, and makes it, irrespective of subject, so profoundly interesting.

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SIX SHILLING NOVELS—*Continued*

THE GIRL FROM GATFORD

By OLIVIA RAMSEY, Author of "The Marriage of Lionel Glyde"

"The Girl from Gatford," Olivia Ramsey's new novel, like its predecessor, "The Marriage of Lionel Glyde," contains in due proportion the ingredients that make for popularity. It is neither abstruse nor argumentative nor artless, but is straightforward, well-observed, and plausible, and related with an undeniable air of reality. A bright, light, humorous and even sparkling bit of writing will be the verdict of the experienced reader upon "The Girl from Gatford."

WHO SHALL HAVE HER?

By JOHN CAVE, Author of "The Wiles of a Wife"

Incident following incident in rapid and strenuous succession, and all of them leading up to a highly dramatic climax, is Mr. Cave's method. From the first page his story grips the reader with force and irresistible power, and whether the scene is laid on the rolling prairies of the Far West, or beneath the shadow of the grey cathedral, it will be found to be instinct with life and power. His characters are drawn vigorously, but they all of them *live*. It is a remarkably vivid and enthralling story.

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SIX SHILLING NOVELS—*Continued*

THE COURTSHIP OF SYBIL

By L. T. MEADE, Author of "Little Josephine"

Mrs. L. T. Meade continues worthily to uphold the high position which she has won as a writer of wholesome domestic fiction. In her latest story, "The Courtship of Sybil," she shows how a high-minded girl, left alone in the world, may fulfil the unpleasant duty imposed upon her by her mother, not only without soiling her personal character, but strengthened by the test—just as gold is purified by fire. Mrs. L. T. Meade has written a story which possesses very endearing qualities.

THE CASE OF SIR GEOFFREY

By FLORENCE WARDEN, Author of "A Devil's Bargain"

In this story Miss Florence Warden, as is her wont, loses no time in getting to the heart of her subject. A lady in straitened circumstances takes, for a nominal rental, an old disused mansion, and her sons on their arrival make a gruesome discovery. A series of complications ensue which tend only to blacken the mystery. The plot is strategically constructed on original lines, and it will perplex and baffle the most acute reader of stories of crime.

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SIX SHILLING NOVELS—*Continued*

ASHES OF PASSION

By Mrs. COULSON KERNAHAN, Author of "The Mystery of Magdalen "

A story of love, revenge and Nemesis. In Christobel Moore we have a powerful picture of the lengths to which a woman scorned will go to avenge herself. In Reginald Maltravers we see how a man of honour may fall a victim to the subtle devices of an alluring woman. Out of tragedy the author eventually brings peace and happiness to those who merit it. Rose Robotham, the little Puritan maiden, who eventually wins the love of Maltravers, is a character full of innocent charm, and makes a capital foil to the artful and unscrupulous Christobel Moore.

BIDDY, THE SPITFIRE

By JOHN LANGFIELD, Author of "A Light-Hearted Rebellion "

Readers who recollect that high-spirited and captivating story, "A Light-Hearted Rebellion," and readers who want to be amused and entertained, should hasten to make themselves familiar with Mr. John Langfield's "Biddy, the Spitfire." They will find in it no abstruse mental or moral questions to vex them. It is a story whose single object is to afford a few happy laughing hours. The plot is fresh and whimsical; the characters are quaint and comical; and the incidents overflow with a light, airy, and infectious gaiety. A toothsome morsel, will be the verdict of readers of all tastes upon "Biddy, the Spitfire."

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SIX SHILLING NOVELS—*Continued*

THE THRESHOLD

By Mrs. WINEFRIDE TRAFFORD-TAUNTON, Author
of "Silent Dominion"

Mrs. Trafford-Taunton is known to an increasing circle as a writer of scholarly and intellectual fiction. Such work is bound in due course to obtain proper recognition. In "The Threshold" the author's powers of profound and systematic thinking are apparent, but superadded to them is a story of emotion and passion and humanity that makes a direct appeal to the heart, no less than to the head. The love of a man of rank and fastidious taste for a girl of the people forms the superstructure of the story, and there are undercurrents in which questions of conscience and niceties of conduct are involved. In this intellectual interpretation of life, Mrs. Trafford-Taunton displays gifts of the first order.

THE TESTAMENT OF JUDAS

By HENRY BYATT, Author of "Land o' Gold,"
"The Flight of Icarus"

This is an imaginary autobiography of Judas Iscariot, the Man of Kerioth. He tells the story of his life from his earliest recollections to the day preceding his death in "the field of Aceldama"; the narrative is linked and completed by a certain Phœnician merchant. Both of these antagonistic and, indeed, most remarkable personalities reveal themselves in the brilliant tones and contrasting shadows of the inspired painter of word-pictures. It may be said of this, the author's latest work, that in it a brilliant and realistic imagination is allied with a tender, poetic reverence for the *pure* and the *sacred*.

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SIX SHILLING NOVELS—*Continued*

THE SEVERN AFFAIR

By GERTRUDE WARDEN, Author of "The Millionaire and the Lady "

Miss Gertrude Warden is an artist who never crowds her canvas unduly ; on the contrary, each character has an appointed task to do, and each stands out clearly and definitely. In this novel a young girl—self-willed but of good instincts—is left to the guardianship of a man whom she has been taught to detest for his supposed cruelties to her family. Gradually the veil is lifted from her eyes ; she learns how he has been maligned, and the duel between them ends in their marriage, notwithstanding the disparity in their years.

THE THUNDER OF THE HOOFS

By WILLIAM HENRY LANG, Author of "The Romance of Australia "

To the Briton there is no class of story which makes a more direct and forcible appeal than the good sporting yarn ; and yet the writers of such fare may be counted on the fingers of one hand. Dr. W. H. Lang is a writer who is himself a sportsman, and has shown his mettle in the field both in this country and in Australia. From the deep well of his experiences he has drawn the materials of a novel which for "go" and "swing" runs the best work of this class very hard. Dr. Lang is a brother of Mr. Andrew Lang, and shows that he, too, is gifted with an exceptional power of writing.

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SIX SHILLING NOVELS—*Continued*

THE COMBAT

By ARTHUR CAMPBELL

Any work that can give "the old folks at home" a moving picture of Colonial life and manners must elicit keen and sympathetic interest, inasmuch as most Britishers want to know something about their kinsmen beyond the seas. In "The Combat" Mr. Arthur Campbell describes for us the Nova Scotia of forty years ago. The events of the novel take place in a village in the heart of the country, and the plot and the characters are native to the soil. In every particular "The Combat" is a reflex of the strong, virile, throbbing, fearless life characteristic of young countries wherein human passions are less under control than they are in the older centres of population. "The Combat" is a work of intense dramatic power, the finished literary style of which would alone render it conspicuous.

FLOWER OF THE WORLD

By Mrs. HENRY TIPPETT

The marriage of a beautiful girl of eighteen with a rich man of fifty furnishes the material for the opening chapter of "Flower of the World." The introduction into their anything but staid and peaceful household of sundry diverse characters, including a malicious gossip and mischief-maker, provides the framework for the subsequent highly interesting proceedings. Mrs. Henry Tippet is a newcomer as a writer of fiction in volume form, but her standard is above the average, and her story must not be overlooked.

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SIX SHILLING NOVELS—*Continued*

THE VEILED LADY

By FLORENCE WARDEN, Author of "A Devil's Bargain"

Among the weavers of the fiction which sweeps the reader off his feet, and hurries him breathlessly to the last word, there is none more skilful or ingenious than Miss Florence Warden. The starting-point of "The Veiled Lady" is the appearance in a sleepy village of two women whose conduct arouses suspicion, and we are straightway plunged into a series of events of a perplexing and disturbing character. Side by side with exciting incidents is a strong and affecting love interest.

THE ONE MOMENT

By LUCAS CLEEVE, Author of "What Woman Wills"

Lucas Cleeve's work is invariably marked by consummate cleverness, and at times by touches of real genius. "The One Moment" is an episode in a mother's life which colours her attitude towards her daughter's momentary infatuation with a married man so as almost to court an overwhelming disaster. The subject is one which could only be successfully treated by a great writer; and in this book—so mature, so fearless, so confident in its grip upon the emotional side of life—Lucas Cleeve affords a revelation even to those who have been impressed by the author's previous record.

John Long's New & Forthcoming Books

SIX SHILLING NOVELS—*Continued*

DR. DALE'S DILEMMA

By G. W. APPLETON, Author of "The Silent Passenger "

A story which contains a diverting as well as a sensational element is the description which, in brief, best applies to "Dr. Dale's Dilemma." The doctor—one of the good old sort—is confronted with the suggestion that the erring wife whom he forgave on her death-bed did not really die, but that she "lived to fight another day." Mr. G. W. Appleton has fastened upon a novel idea, and he has exploited it with more than his usual acumen. The book will allure all tastes ; and what more can be desired ?

THE WORLD, THE FLESH, AND THE CASINO

By GERTRUDE WARDEN, Author of "The Millionaire and the Lady "

Miss Gertrude Warden's latest work portrays the life of a young man of position, about to be married, who has been kept away from a knowledge of realities, but who is led into temptation by a reprobate friend. The play which Miss Gertrude Warden makes of this material may be imagined, and the catastrophe, when it comes, is complete. Yet the story works out to a happy ending, although not to the conventional happy ending. "The World, the Flesh, and the Casino " is a sound, sturdy, and sterling novel which will meet with universal approval.

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SIX SHILLING NOVELS—*Continued*

FATALITY

By G. G. CHATTERTON, Author of "The Dictionary of Fools"

Mr. G. G. Chatterton is an eloquent and conscientious writer whose novels have gained for him the favour of the public which reads the best fiction. In "Fatality" he propounds a question of conduct of some nicety. A marriage of convenience ends in the death of the husband under equivocal circumstances, and the point arises as to how far the past should be permitted to stand in the way of a future of happiness. Mr. Chatterton deals with his materials with great skill and ability and conviction. The novel stands out of the rut inasmuch as it contrives to be at once real and living and pleasant and wholesome.

IDOLS OF FLESH

By PAUL CRESWICK, Author of "The Temple of Folly," "At the Sign of the Cross Keys"

This story of a London Girl—a childlike passionate creature, lovable, beautiful, unreasonable as all her sex, is told simply and forcibly. Fairy's idolising affection for her deformed irritable brother, her vacillations, weaknesses—her tender innocence of heart—all these things, apart from her mere personal beauty, make her a natural cause of strife betwixt the two other markedly different men who influence her in turns.

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John Long's New & Forthcoming Books

SIX SHILLING NOVELS—*Continued*

THE BOMB

By FRANK HARRIS, Author of "Montes the Matador," "Elder Conklin," etc.

Daily Telegraph.—"Reads like a page of real life, written down by a man who actually did take part in the scenes described so vividly. We feel, by the form of the story, that it is not a description, a piece of imagination, but a human document. To have so well succeeded in making us feel this is perhaps the greatest achievement of a piece of work which is full of remarkable qualities. We must not leave the tale without mentioning the wonderful love story of Rudolf and Elsie, a fine piece of psychology, as true as it is moving, and of a quality rarely to be found in fiction."

THE MONEY-CHANGERS

By UPTON SINCLAIR, Author of "The Jungle,"
"The Metropolis"

The Times.—"Mr. Upton Sinclair's subject is so momentous. . . . He writes with deadly earnestness and sincerity. The abuses of the American money power, its tyranny and recklessness, and the corruption with which it reeks itself and infects the atmosphere of politics and social life, are matters of the gravest concern to believers in progress and democracy."

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SIX SHILLING NOVELS—*Continued*

THE OTHER SARA

By CURTIS YORKE, Author of "Their Marriage,"
"Only Betty." With beautiful Coloured Frontis-
piece of the Heroine

Critics and readers alike are at one that in her own particular domain of fiction Curtis Yorke stands alone and is unapproachable. In her newest novel, "The Other Sara," she presents an idea that is well in keeping with its charming setting. A firm of over-zealous lawyers erroneously pounce upon Sara as the next-of-kin of a demi-millionaire. How Sara descends upon the aristocratic family to which she is supposed to belong; how she shocks and amuses some, and becomes a fairy godmother to others—all this, and much beside, is told with the lightest of touches, in which vivacity and good-humour are allied to the true note of distinction.

THE SUSPICIONS OF ERMENGARDE

By MAXWELL GRAY, Author of "The Silence of
Dean Maitland," "The Great Refusal"

This novel is the history of the adventures and misadventures of an untravelled traveller, on a winter holiday at some of the loveliest health resorts in the Western Riviera. It is written in light comedy vein; two minor love stories are interwoven with the main plot of misunderstandings and mistakes. Sunshine and gaiety are the dominant notes; all entanglements and intrigues are happily cleared up in the end. Maxwell Gray, whose last success was "The Great Refusal," published two years ago by Mr. John Long, is, as everybody knows, the author of that very popular work of fiction, "The Silence of Dean Maitland," which took the world by storm some years ago.

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John Long's New & Forthcoming Books

SIX SHILLING NOVELS—*Continued*

THRICE ARMED

By HAROLD BINDLOSS, Author of "Delilah of the Snows"

"Thrice Armed" relates the struggles of a young mail-boat officer who renounces his career to take up his ruined father's quarrel with an unscrupulous capitalist. The scenes are laid on the Pacific Coast of North America, at sea and in the cities, and a little, cheaply-built steamer which is run by a few struggling men in opposition to the rich man's vessels figures in most of them. The young officer's sister, who cannot forget her father's wrongs, plays a leading part in the maritime vendetta.

LOVE'S FOOL—THE CONFESSIONS OF A MAGDALEN

By Mrs. STANLEY WRENCH

Morning Post.—"There is more than enough merit, both literary and psychological, in 'Love's Fool.' Mrs. Wrench has talent of an unusual order, is possessed of a sense of drama, a gift for pleasing and graphic prose, and a fine faculty of psychological perception. There is poignancy and grip in this tale."

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JAMES BLYTH

Pall Mall Gazette.—"Amazement," by its title, but faintly expresses the emotions with which it will be read. The critical must admit the richness of its humour, its faithfulness to life, and its sound literary quality. Mr. Blyth has never produced work which is cleverer, and 'Amazement' must be regarded as one of the strongest novels of the season."

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This extraordinary book has met with remarkable success, and editions have been published in nearly all European countries and the United States. The sales, in the English Edition alone, have been enormous, and it is estimated that the total sales to date number nearly 1,000,000 (one million).

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Times.—"The *motif* is a delicate one, suited, it should be said, only to the experienced; but it is treated with dignity and restraint. The situations and the dialogue, too, are handled with sureness and skill; and the two sisters present feminine character-studies of singular beauty."

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